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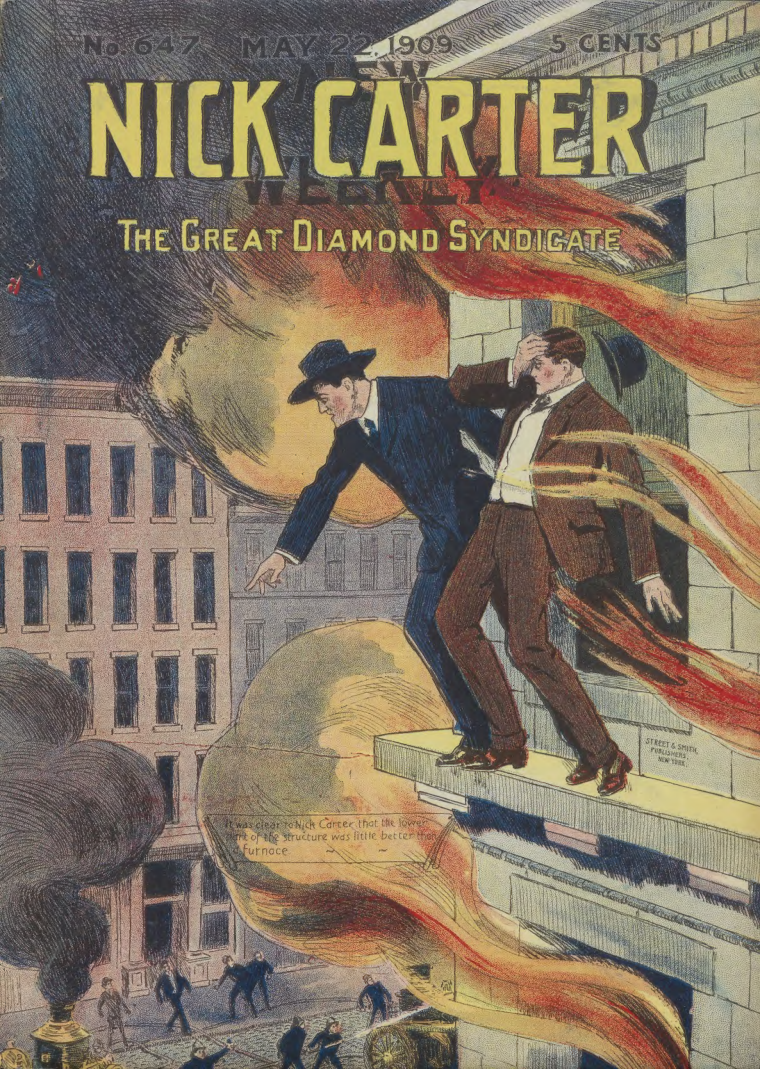
NICK CARTER

WEEKLY

THE GREAT DIAMOND SYNDICATE


It was clear to Nick Carter that the lower
part of the structure was little better than a
furnace
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NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

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THE GREAT DIAMOND SYNDICATE;

OR,

Nick Carter's Cleverest Foes.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

MAYNARD'S FOLLY.

"Do you mean that you have with you over half a million dollars in diamonds—here on the Bowery at midnight?"

"That is the situation."

"I had an idea that the gems you were handling so carelessly were paste."

"Not a bit of it. They are the real thing."

"Your entire collection?"

"The same."

"Then you are running a fearful risk, especially when the nature of our visit to this part of the city is considered. How many members of the dramatic club know that you are carrying the diamonds in your pocket to-night?"

"All of them, I take it. The gems were much admired."

"Then you're a fool, Charley Maynard. Why, it's simply tempting Providence. You alarm me."

The speakers were Charley Maynard and Henry Townsend, his chum; the place was a popular café on the Bowery, and the time was midnight.

They were young men of wealth and fine social position, both residents of the City of New York and great chums.

They were taking a light luncheon in a rear room of the café.

That evening they had attended a dress rehearsal of a play soon to be presented in the interest of charity by a dramatic club of which they were both members.

They were now waiting at the Bowery café for the arrival of an acquaintance, one Julius Mantelle by name, who was to conduct them to a private interview with a female fortune teller over whom the city was at that time in a craze.

The appointment had been made that evening during the rehearsal already mentioned, and was for two o'clock at the woman's rooms, not far from the place where the young men waited.

"I wish you hadn't mentioned the diamonds," said Maynard presently. "You have about spoiled my evening. It makes me nervous, now that you mention them, to think of their being here at this time."

"I should think it would," said Townsend. "How did you come to do it?"

"Oh, they are to be used during the play, you know, and this was the last full-dress rehearsal, so I carried them down. Then, during the rehearsal, this appointment was made, unexpectedly, as you know, and I had to bring the gems with me or leave them there with the other properties."

"They would have been safer there," urged Townsend. "We don't know what sort of a game we are going up against at the den of this African fortune teller. She is a mystery to the police, and is surrounded by a lot of servants who would, I actually believe, even do murder for her. We don't even know Mantelle, who made the appointment for us at the hour of two in the morning—an unusual time, to say the least. Yes, I know! He seems to have plenty of money, and is a good entertainer, but what else do we know about him? It will never answer, Maynard. You must get rid of those diamonds before we go to that woman's den."

"But how?"

"Let me carry them to the nearest respectable hotel and have them placed in the vault."

"Oh, I need not trouble you to do that. I can go myself."

"But it is a risk for you to go," said Townsend. "If you have been watched or followed, you would never get to the hotel, while no one would suspect me of having the diamonds. Pass them over while no one is in the room with us."

"Pshaw!" cried Maynard. "You are making a mountain out of a mole hill."

"I have heard it said," continued Townsend, "that blood never washes off a diamond. The first night these gems were in America your uncle, Alvin Maynard, was murdered defending them, as he believed. Anton Sawtelle, your cousin by marriage, and Bernice Bouvé, your aunt's maid, conspired to steal them. Two sailors who had followed them to this country stole them. Only for Nick Carter, the famous detective, you would have lost your inheritance from your father right there."

"And Nick came near being killed," said Maynard.

"Yes, and one of the burglars was killed, and the bully who killed him went to the electric chair, and Hartley, the diamond merchant who hired him to do the deed, went up for life, and Anton and Bernice are doing time now. A fine record those diamonds have! Come, let me be off with them—that is, if you can trust me with half a million."

"If you think it is as serious as all that," said Maynard, "I'll let you have them, but it looks like we were getting frightened at nothing. You are mistaken about Anton and Bernice. They were sentenced to short terms on the recommendation of Nick Carter, and are both out. I saw Anton yesterday. He came to the home of his mother and made all sorts of promises for the future."

"And where is Bernice?"

"She did not return to Aunt Maynard. I think, however, that Anton knows where she is, and will assist her if he succeeds in getting money from his mother."

"I don't like the pair," said Townsend, "any more than I like the circumstances of the night. You certainly must get rid of the diamonds."

"I suppose so, but how? If we really are in danger, it is not safe for you to take them. Suppose we call a cab and both go to the Wisconsin? That's rather a neat little hotel over on Broadway."

"No, you remain here, and I'll walk there. You must see the necessity of not seeming to be going away for a purpose."

"All right, then. Here are the diamonds. Hurry back."

Young Maynard passed a rather bulky package to Townsend and the latter hurried away. At the door of the room he paused and turned back.

"I'll go to the Wisconsin first," he said, "and if there is no chance there I'll go on up Broadway. You wait until I return."

Townsend closed the door and walked through the outer room to the street. As he did so a dark, lithe, muscular man of perhaps thirty years, who had been standing at the cigar case for a moment, stepped to the street door and spoke a few words to a man standing there. Then he turned to the cigar case again, and as he did so was accosted by a young man as dark and as sinister of face as himself.

"Well?" asked the elder man.

"The young fellow took them off with him."

"Where?"

"To a hotel."

"I see," said the other. "To the Wisconsin. Get a cab—quick."

"But the night is dark and he is walking."

"Never mind that now. Get a cab, pick up Number Two at the corner and drive quickly to the Wisconsin. Number Two knows what to do on arrival."

The young man hastened away, and the other paid for a package of cigars he had ordered and took his departure.

Young Maynard waited half an hour for the return

of his friend, but he did not come. As he was about to go in search of him, Julius Mantelle entered the room.

"I am late," said the fresh arrival, throwing himself into a chair and ringing for an attendant. "I met a friend out here and he steered me up against a jolly bunch that just let go of me. Where is Townsend?"

"He was called away," replied Maynard, becoming every instant more anxious for his friend. "I am expecting him every moment."

When the attendant arrived Julius ordered brandy and cigars and set out to make himself at home. He was a man of sallow skin and slender build. His eyes were dark and dull in repose, but they flashed like those of a snake under excitement. His nose was broad at the nostrils, his lips were thick, his hair jet black and curly. He spoke English with a slight French accent. Maynard had known him only a few weeks, having met him at the house of a mutual acquaintance. From that first day Mantelle had seemed to court the acquaintance and companionship of the young millionaire.

"Townsend is late," said Mantelle presently. "We shall miss the appointment."

Maynard could hardly retain his seat in his chair. He was fearful that his friend had come to some injury in his service. Surely, he had been absent long enough to have executed his commission twice over. He was not thinking of the appointment. He was wondering how he could obtain news of his friend without exciting the curiosity of the man sitting there.

"Shall we go without him?" asked Julius, after a time.

"By no means," was the reply. "I shall wait for a few minutes and then look him up if he does not return."

"In that case," said the other, "we may as well call the appointment off. I am confoundedly sleepy anyway. See you to-morrow."

Mantelle went away and Maynard sprang for the phone. Two millions in diamonds would have appeared as small to him as did the half million involved when it came to a question of the safety of his friend. He began to understand now that he had made an awful mistake in carrying the diamonds about with him.

At the phone he called up the Wisconsin hotel, asking for the clerk. When that rather important individual was on the wire Maynard asked:

"Was there a young man there within the hour asking to leave a package in the safe until morning?"

"No," came the short reply.

Maynard gave a brief description of his friend's personal appearance, and asked:

"Was such a person there for any purpose?"

"Yes," was the reply.

"Did he make his business known?"

"He immediately went to one of the rooms in response to a call left at the desk for him," was the answer.

Maynard experienced a feeling of relief, but only for a moment.

"Is he there still?" he then asked.

"He came down almost immediately and went away," was the reply.

Maynard hung up the receiver, his face white and drawn. There was still much information to be asked at the hotel, but not by phone.

"Something has happened," he thought. "Townsend may be dead, for all I know. It was a horrible mistake to permit him to go away alone with the diamonds. Why should he go to a room at the Wisconsin and leave immediately? Why should he keep me here in suspense when he understood how anxious I was as to the result of his mission? I can never solve the problem alone. I wonder if it is possible to reach Mr. Carter to-night? I wonder if he will come?"

The excited young man called the detective's private number and waited with wildly beating heart. Presently a response came over the wire.

"Is Mr. Carter there?" he asked.

"Talking," was the reply, much to Maynard's relief.

In a few words Maynard explained the exact situation.

"I may be unnecessarily alarmed," he said, "but I feel that something ought to be done at once. Can you come?"

"Immediately," was the prompt response, and Maynard hung up the receiver to walk and worry until the famous detective laid a hand on his shoulder.

CHAPTER II.

A FATAL ERRAND.

"Now tell me about it," said Nick, as soon as they had gained the seclusion of a private room.

Maynard told the story of the night, not sparing himself in the least.

The detective looked very grave.

"Is it serious?" asked the young man.

"I am afraid so," was the reply, "but hope for the best. We can do nothing here, so we may as well go to the Wisconsin at once."

While Maynard was cheered by the presence of the great detective, he realized that Nick's willingness to respond to his call meant that the detective feared more than the loss of the diamonds. He would hardly have left his bed at that hour simply for the purpose of recovering diamonds which had been carelessly lost track of.

Arrived at the hotel, the detective made himself known to the clerk, that being the surest way of securing the attention he required. The clerk was at once all smiles, ready to answer all questions, to do anything in his power to accommodate the famous detective, whose appearance at the hotel was forever afterward spoken of as a notable event.

"First," said Nick, "we must learn whether it was really Townsend who came here. Describe the young man you have reference to."

"Medium build," began the clerk; "brown hair, light mustache, blue eyes, Roman nose, very fair complexion."

"That is the man," said Maynard.

"Wait," said Nick. "How was he dressed?"

"Suit of blue basket cheviot, sacque coat, vest cut high, dark-brown derby hat, wing collar, blue four-in-hand tie with red threads in it, small diamond pin on the tie, long cuffs with amethyst buttons, diamond ring on the little finger of the left hand."

"That was Townsend," said Maynard.

"You ought to have been a detective," said Nick to the clerk. "Now show us to the room to which he was taken."

"But the message which called him to the room," suggested Maynard. "What about that? Who sent it, and from what place was it sent?"

"That we may learn of the man whom he visited," said Nick, and the three took the elevator to the third floor. The halls were well lighted, but seemed deserted, and they were alone in the elevator, with the exception of the boy operator.

"The man who took the room seems to be awake," said the clerk, pointing to the transom over the door of room 43. "There is a light inside."

The clerk knocked on the panel of the door, but there was no response.

"Perhaps he is asleep," said the clerk. "I'll try him again."

There was no response to the second summons, and the detective took out his picklock. In a moment the door flew open.

Nick stepped inside, then turned and faced Maynard in the doorway. His face was paler than usual, but there was no excitement in his manner.

"Wait a moment," he said to the young man. "Prepare yourself for a shock before you step into the room."

"Who is there?" whispered Maynard, who seemed to have lost the power of loud speech. "Is he ill?"

The clerk brushed by the two men and advanced to a table which stood at the centre of the room, and at which a figure clad only in white underclothing was half sitting, half lying, with arms resting on the top.

"Ill!" cried the clerk, in a tone of horror. "The man is dead!"

Maynard sank into a chair and covered his face with his hands. He knew only too well the form at the table. Nick turned to the clerk and asked:

"Is this the young man who was summoned to this room by a call?"

"Yes," was the hoarse reply.

"But you stated that he left the hotel almost immediately."

"Some one left," was the horrified reply, "and that some one wore the clothes I described to you. See! This young man has been stripped, and there are the clothes of the man who made the exchange!"

There could be no doubt about it. The dead man at the table was Townsend.

The grief of Maynard was pitiful.

"If I had only taken my chances with the diamonds," he muttered. "Poor Townsend, to come to this at last! It was all my fault, Mr. Carter. I sent him to his death!"

"The diamonds!" echoed the clerk. "Does this mean robbery as well as murder?"

"That remains to be seen," replied the detective.

As Nick spoke he lifted from the floor a small square of oiled silk, red in color. He held it up for the inspection of Maynard.

"Were the diamonds wrapped in this?" he asked.

Maynard nodded. "That is only part of the wrapping," he said.

"Were the diamonds of great value?" asked the clerk.

"Half a million," was the short reply. Nick now regarded the jewels as a small part of the case. The thing to do was to locate and punish the murderer of Henry Townsend.

The clerk stepped back in wonder.

"He should have left them in the safe," he said.

"That is what he came here to do," said the detective. "Now, before the coroner or the police are notified, I must search this room for some clue to the identity of the murderer. But first, tell me everything you know regarding the occupant of this room, the person who murdered this poor boy and walked out of the hotel dressed in the victim's clothes. When was the room taken?"

"Not ten minutes before the young man you call Townsend came."

Maynard sprang to his feet.

"Then the murderer knew where Townsend was going when he set off on foot from the café—knew where he was going and what he carried, and laid a trap for him!" he cried.

"What was said?" asked Nick.

"He came to the desk and asked if any one had called for Martin Haynes. I said that there had been no such party asked for. Then he said that he had a message for a friend of his who might call there during the night. If he did call he was to be sent up to room forty-three. When Townsend came in I gave him the message and he went up at once. I don't know what the message was."

"Townsend said nothing about leaving a parcel in the safe when he came in?"

"No, sir. He seemed surprised at the message and went straight to the elevator."

"How was the person who took this room dressed?"

"All in black, including hat and tie, frock coat. He was a dusky sort of fellow, with black eyes and hair, just about Townsend's size."

"Not like Townsend in feature or complexion?"

"Not in the least," replied the clerk slowly, with a look of perplexity growing on his face. "I can see now," he added, "how mistaken I was in supposing that it was Mr. Townsend who left the hotel. I can't understand, however, how I came to be so careless, for it is my duty to know what goes on here at night."

"I presume that you did not notice the person who went out, except generally, and were deceived by the clothes worn," said Nick.

"Of course that is it," was the reply, "but all the same, I don't make many mistakes like that. I couldn't keep my job if I did."

"And the person who engaged the room gave the name of Martin Haynes?" asked the detective.

"Yes, sir."

"Register?"

"Yes, sir."

"Any baggage?"

"No, sir," replied the clerk. "He paid in advance for one night, and nothing was said about baggage."

"Who occupied this room yesterday?"

"A young man who comes here once a week, usually Thursday. He travels for a wholesale house."

"Does he always have this room?"

"Oh, no, sir."

"Then he does not leave his clothing or toilet articles here?"

"He does not."

"How long since has a woman occupied the room?"

The clerk pondered a moment.

"At least two weeks," he replied, at length. "It may be more than that."

"That is all for the present," said Nick. "We'll come down presently and look at this Mr. Haynes' signature on the register. By the way, was it a very stout person?"

"On the contrary, he was a very slender man," replied the clerk.

"Mustache?" asked Nick.

"Yes, sir, a black mustache."

"Hands large or small?"

"Quite small, sir, and sparkling with a fine ring."

"Diamond?" asked the detective.

"Yes, sir. The real thing."

"Send in the night elevator boy when you go out," said Nick.

CHAPTER III.

A STARTLING DISCOVERY.

The clerk passed out of the room with an offended air. He was loth to leave the presence of the great detective without gaining some notion as to his course of action in the murder case. The elevator boy soon made his appearance, and Nick asked:

"You have been on duty all night?"

"Yes, sir."

"You carried a slender, dark-faced person up to this room an hour or so ago?"

"Yes, sir."

Nick looked at his watch. The hands pointed to the hour of two.

"Can you tell me the exact time?" he asked.

"It was ten minutes past one when I left the office for the elevator," was the reply.

"Did the person speak to you on the way up?"

"Yes, sir," was the reply. "He asked me about the

fire escape and the stairs winding about the elevator well. Seemed afraid of fire."

"About the voice? Harsh or soft?"

"Soft and low, sir."

"Yes, yes. And when did that person go down again?"

"I don't know, sir. He did not go down in the cage."

"Did you see the person going down?"

"No, sir."

"Did you see him pass through the office?"

"No, sir. It was late, and I guess I was asleep in the elevator."

"You saw the young man who came to this room?"

"The brown-haired one? Yes, sir."

Nick pointed to the silent figure in the chair at the table.

The boy stepped forward and peered into the dead man's face.

"Gee!" he cried, springing toward the door, "why didn't you tell me he was dead? Did that other feller kill him?"

"That is what we are trying to find out," said Nick. "Now, when this young man came up in the elevator, did he say anything to you?"

"Yes, he asked me if I knew the party in forty-three."

"And you?"

"I told him that I did not. I had seen him only once."

"Is that all he said?"

"Yes, sir."

"How did he act?"

"Queer, I thought. When he stepped out of the cage he turned back again, as if he thought of going back down with me. Once or twice he clutched his left side, up there by the inside pocket."

"I wish he had gone down again!" cried Maynard, starting from his chair. "He lost his life by going on! Can nothing be done, Mr. Carter? Is he past all hope of recovery?"

Nick dismissed the elevator boy and turned to the agitated young man.

"Don't give way to your emotions now," he said. "We have much to do if the murderer is ever brought to justice and the diamonds recovered."

"Never mind the diamonds," said Maynard. "I wish I had never set eyes on them! First my poor uncle, and now my best friend! The devil is in the diamonds! I hope I shall never see them again."

"Are you strong enough to remain here while I take a look at the body and the room? If not, you would better sit in the office."

"Oh, yes, I'll remain here. Poor Henry! You don't know what it is to lose a chum like that."

Nick approached the body and lifted the head from the table.

There was no blood in sight.

But just over the heart was a faint stain. The detective opened the shirt and saw a tiny puncture in the breast. The dead man had been stabbed with some slender weapon. The wound was exactly over the heart.

Nick gazed long and thoughtfully at the still figure. He did not understand how the wound could have been made so exactly over the vital spot. If Townsend had resisted, such a mode of murder would have been impossible. Then a light came to the wondering detective.

He bent forward and laid his face close to that of the dead man.

"I thought so!" he then muttered.

"What is it?" asked Maynard.

"A spray of chloroform was thrown into Townsend's face and the wound was made while he was dazed, if not quite unconscious."

"But if the murderer had him under the influence of the drug, why did he not permit the drug to do the work? This stabbing seems brutal and unnecessary."

"I can't understand that part of it myself," said Nick. "However, we shall know more of the details before long."

"What sort of a weapon was it?" asked Maynard. "The cut is a tiny one."

"It might have been made with a hatpin," said Nick.

"Men don't carry hatpins about with them," said Maynard.

"This murder," replied Nick, "was committed by a woman."

"A woman!" echoed Maynard.

"Exactly, by a woman disguised as a man. That may be why the young man was dazed with a spray of chlorofrom before the fatal blow was struck. The woman was not strong or daring enough to take the risk of determined resistance."

"But how do you know that it was a woman who was here? The clerk said nothing about that."

"The clerk was deceived. See here! This blue ribbon comes from the front of a woman's under vest. In the haste of dressing in Townsend's clothes, the ribbon broke and she tossed it aside. There are other things that tell me it was a woman, sure enough."

"Think of a woman doing a thing like this!" cried Maynard.

"Horrible crimes have been committed by women," said Nick, laying the cast-off clothing of the murderer on the table and drawing up a chair.

"There is nothing in the pockets," he finally said. "Not a blessed thing. Now for the tailor. Ah!"

"What is it?" asked Maynard as Nick gave a start of surprise.

"The clothes," he said, "were made in Paris by M. Dumond. Here is the mark of the firm on the inner side of the collar. Careless thing to leave that mark here. It tells a great deal."

"I see no name there," said Maynard.

"Of course not," said the detective, "but the trade-mark of the firm is here. I have seen it before under similar circumstances. Dumond makes clothes for actors; and has also been nicknamed the thieves' tailor. In other words, he makes duplicates, imitations, disguises, and all sorts of trick garments. He is known by the better class of rascals the world over."

"Then we can easily learn the name of the person who ordered this suit."

CHAPTER IV.

THE HUSTLING REPORTER.

Nick smiled at the simplicity of the young man.

"Dumond has a reputation for keeping his mouth shut," he said, "and that is the reason he has built up such a profitable business. Go to him to-morrow with this suit, trade-mark and all, and he will swear that the trade-mark is a forgery, and that he never saw the clothes before."

"Do you think the woman came to America in quest of these diamonds?" asked Maynard. "You know they were once followed from South Africa, by way of England."

Nick did not reply immediately. He was examining a comb and brush which lay upon a dresser at the head of the bed.

"Look here," he finally said, turning to Maynard with the brush and comb in his hand, "the woman could not resist the temptation to primp before the mirror. And she left hairs in the brush and the comb."

Maynard took the brush into his hand.

"What do you see there?" asked Nick.

"Not black hairs, certainly. Short red hairs."

"Exactly!"

"But this person was dark," insisted Maynard; "at least so described by the clerk."

"Also described by the clerk as a man," said Nick, with a smile.

"How do you know that these hairs were not left here by some former occupant of the room?" asked the young man.

"Because," was the reply, "she combed her hair, after removing her black wig, before she removed her clothes. There were short red hairs on the collar of the coat she wore."

"A red-haired woman," mused Maynard.

"Very slender and with black eyes," added Nick. "She couldn't color her eyes, you know, and the clerk said they were black. We may also add a very nice white complexion."

Nick went to the washstand in the corner of the room and pointed to a black sediment on the sides of the bowl. The piece of toilet soap which lay on the marble top was also rimmed with black. The interior of the bowl and the surface of the soap were still moist.

"There is where she washed off her face stain," said Nick. "So we have a slender, red-haired, fair-complexioned woman, about five feet three, according to the clothes, with very small feet and hands."

"How do you know about the feet and hands?" asked the young man.

"The woman slopped water from the bowl as she washed," was the reply, "and it fell on the carpet and over her shoes. See, the spot where this foot stood is dry; the carpet is wet, and the dry spot represents a very small shoe."

"We started in with a dark-complexioned male murderer," said Maynard, "and now we have come to a fair-faced woman with red hair, and clothes made in Paris."

"You asked me a moment ago," said Nick, "if I thought this woman came across the Atlantic in quest of these diamonds, and I made no reply. Now, I can tell you that it is possible that she did, and that she did not come alone."

"A conspiracy for robbery?"

"That is about the size of it, as it looks now."

"Do you think this affair in any way connected with the former larceny of the diamonds, when they were followed from South Africa?"

"There is little doubt of it," was the reply. "Who was with you to-night besides the dead man?"

"Why, I was at rehearsal, as I told you at first. That is the way the diamonds came to be with me. They were to be used in the play, you know."

"And the members of the club knew that you had them with you?"

"Of course. They admired them vastly."

"And who did you talk with about them, especially, I mean?"

"Julius Mantelle, I think."

"Who is he?"

"A recent acquaintance from Paris and a member of the club. During the rehearsal he made an appointment with me."

"Where were you going?"

"Why, I told you about that. To the African fortune teller's. We had a date for two o'clock, and we waited at the café, Townsend and I, for Julius to come."

"He did not arrive until after Townsend left?"

"No. He went home with one of the ladies."

"Had you talked with Julius, as you call him, about the African fortune teller before to-night? You mean the fortune teller out on East Houston Street?"

"Oh, yes, he had long promised to secure a private séance for Townsend and I, and to-night the chance came."

"What do you know of Julius Mantelle?"

"Nothing."

"Is he in business?"

"He is just a globe trotter, I think."

"Plenty of money?"

"I think so. He never borrows."

"How long have you known him?"

"About three months."

"He came from Paris to New York?"

"So I am informed. That must be the clerk coming back, and there seems to be some one with him. I wonder if he called the police?"

The next moment the door was thrust open, and the clerk, accompanied by a youth of breezy manners and "loud" clothes, swung into the room. Nick looked at them sternly, for he was not patient when disturbed at his work.

"What do you want?" he asked.

The young man, who was red-headed, freckled-faced and the owner of a perennial smile, advanced toward the detective.

"I am to blame for the intrusion," he said. "I'm a reporter for the *Morning Glowworm*, and want to know all about this murder and the loss of the diamonds. Which is Mr. Charles Maynard, and which is Mr. Nicholas Carter, the famous detective? Ah! the coroner has not been called as yet. Here is the body of the murdered man. What luck! Now, if you will stand aside I'll take a snap shot of it."

The young man began arranging a camera which he carried in his coat pocket. Nick took him by the back of the neck and landed him outside the door.

"Now, keep out of here," he said. "And you, too," he added, turning to the clerk.

"Oh, you can't stop the press," shouted the reporter, pounding on the door. "I've got the story right here. And another one to boot. Young girl mysteriously murdered half an hour ago in a tenement on East Houston Street. Beautiful girl! I took her picture."

Nick opened the door.

"Come in here and tell me about it," he said.

"Oh, you have thawed out, have you?" said the young man. "Well, I don't know much about the case. The girl had been out during the night, I take it. Anyway, there was a row, and the girl was stabbed. The people of the tenement declare they had a row over diamonds, or something of that sort. I'm going back there right now. Want to come with me?"

"It may have some connection with this case," whispered Maynard to the detective. "Diamonds in the case, you know."

"I was just thinking of that," said Nick, "but I am not entirely satisfied that this young man is just what he pretends to be."

"I might go back with him and find out," suggested Maynard.

For a moment Nick made no reply.

CHAPTER V.

INTO THE TRAP.

"No," said the detective presently, "I think I'd better go myself, though it may be a trap. Hold these people here while I slip down to the phone."

During the absence of the detective the red-headed young man moved swiftly about the room. To Maynard he seemed to be looking for something. He hung constantly in the vicinity of the chair upon which the murderer's clothing had been placed after the exchange of garments. Once or twice he got down on the floor and examined the carpet. Maynard thought this remarkable, but said nothing.

When Nick returned from the phone booth and the young man was still busy in his search of the room, Maynard explained his actions to the detective, who smiled and said not a word in reply.

"Well, I've got to get a move on," said the young fellow, in a moment. "Are you chaps coming with me?"

"We must wait for the coroner," replied Nick.

And so they waited, while the young man fumed up and down. Nick turned to the clerk again, motioning him into the hall, where he followed.

"When Townsend entered the office," he asked, "how did you know that he was the one this Martin Haynes had asked for?"

"Oh, Haynes gave me a description and a name."

This set Nick to thinking on new lines for a moment. Then he said:

"While we are waiting for the coroner, we may as well go to the office and inspect the signature."

Leaving Maynard and the reporter in the room, Nick and the clerk descended to the office. The signature, when inspected through a powerful glass, proved to be a very ordinary one, but Nick made certain that it was written by a woman.

"How did that reporter get in here?" asked Nick.

"I suspect that the elevator boy gave him a tip," was the reply.

Nick called the boy, who looked confused, and neither admitted nor denied the accusation.

Presently a deputy coroner arrived, and Nick accompanied him to room 43. While the reporter was asking him impossible questions, Nick took the clothing left by the murderer to the office and left it with the clerk, carefully wrapped.

"Give that to no one," he said. "I will call for the package in person."

Then the reporter and Maynard came down the elevator, and the former started off.

"I'm going," he said. "Come along."

"Shall I come?" whispered Maynard.

"It is a trap," said Nick, "and you may as well go home so as to be fit to-morrow."

"Why do you say it is a trap?"

"Because that chap is not a reporter. How do I know? If he was a reporter he would have telephoned in something for the first edition the minute he saw the body without waiting for anything more. Besides, what has he learned about the dead man or the circumstances of the murder?"

"But if it is a trap, why do you go?"

"Because, if it is a trap, it is set by the murderer or some of her confederates, and going with this young man will place me in touch with the gang."

"But it is dangerous."

"All my work is dangerous."

"Why don't you take officers with you?"

"I shall not be alone," replied Nick significantly, and turned away with the red-headed young fellow.

As the detective and his young companion passed out of the square of light in front of the hotel, Maynard, standing irresolute at the window, saw two men who had been hidden in a stairway across Broadway leave their shelter and follow them. Alarmed at the occurrence, Maynard stepped out into the street and passed on in the direction taken by the detective, the reporter and their pursuers.

He saw them turn east, and then they were lost to his sight. With a heavy heart the young millionaire returned to the hotel. Policemen were standing guard out in the hall.

There was a door connecting room 43 with 44. Maynard secured the latter room and threw himself on the bed. He lay for a long time listening to the talk of the officers, but finally fell into an uneasy slumber.

When he awoke again there was a bright light in 43. His door was a trifle ajar, and he could hear voices in the room where the dead man lay. He arose and stepped toward the door. Then a voice that he knew came to his ears. It was the voice of a woman.

"I think we've settled Nicholas for good and all," she said. "That was a clever thought."

Maynard started back in terror. What was that woman doing there, in the room with his murdered chum? Why should she desire to see the detective come to harm. Maynard actually pinched himself to see if he was not dreaming. But what he heard was a reality, fast enough. Had this woman whose voice he heard taken any part in the murder? While the young man puzzled over the matter another voice reached his ears:

"Yes, Nick will trouble us no more," it said. "He went up against the wrong bunch this time."

This voice was as familiar to Maynard as the other, only it was a man's voice. He could not figure it out? Why should these people be here, and why was the room open at all? Had Nick Carter come to harm? With this thought prominent in his mind Maynard moved toward the doorway. In the half light of the room he stumbled over a rocker and fell heavily to the floor. Before he could get on his feet again he heard quick steps rushing into the room, saw a blaze of light from the doorway, saw, also, two faces that he knew, rage and apprehension showing upon them. Then he called out, saw an uplifted arm, heard a wrathful voice, and the blow descended.

When the officers came to 43 in the early morning they found the door to 44 open. Entering, they found Maynard lying on the floor with a frightful wound in his head and a stab in the region of the heart. Room 43 gave many evidences of having been searched thoroughly. Even the carpet had been loosened in places. The body of Townsend, however, had been in no wise disturbed. Maynard was conveyed to his hotel and the dead man taken to the residence of his parents.

"If Maynard lives," the doctor said, "it will be a wonder. He was left for dead."

The clue to the murderer which he had stumbled on was of no avail at that time, for what he knew might never aid in the detection of the criminals. The wound on the head, the doctor said, was liable to produce a lapse of memory which would go further back than the night on which it was received.

In the meantime, Nick Carter was satisfied that Maynard had gone to his rooms from the hotel, and would remain there until the next day. As he walked down the street with the self-styled reporter, the detective listened between steps for a sound he hoped to hear, not far away. No such sound came to his ears. Presently he found himself in Houston Street.

The house occupied by the African fortune teller with whom Maynard and Townsend had made an appointment was not far away. Nick knew the place well, for, as much out of curiosity as anything, he had called upon the woman when she had first attracted the attention of the town, and had made a close scrutiny of her apartments, which were on the first floor of an old residence not far from the East River.

There was a red light over the door, but the building seemed still and the window shades were closely drawn. The young man stopped directly in front of the house.

"This is the place," he said.

Again Nick listened for the expected footfalls, but in vain. There was nothing for it but to go in alone and trust to luck. He had summoned Chick and Patsy from his home when he had called the coroner, instructing them to hasten to the hotel and trail him, wherever he went. Something had possibly happened to disarrange the plan.

CHAPTER VI.

THE GREAT DIAMOND SYNDICATE.

"Are you coming in?" asked the alleged reporter. "The girl I told you of is in the rear room on the second floor."

Nick made a quick decision.

"Go ahead," he said.

He knew that he was entering a hostile house, and that his life would be in danger, but he had no thought of turning back.

The young man rang the bell, and in a moment the door was opened, showing the interior of a plainly furnished hallway from which a flight of stairs led to a floor above. The place was illuminated only by the red hanging lamp which showed through the transom over the street door; and the general appearance was mysterious. Somehow the atmosphere of the room carried out the impression given by the light. The first impulse on entering was to flee from some unseen peril. There was a strong odor of musk about the place, and this seemed to the vivid imagination to conceal the presence of something uncanny.

As the two entered the hallway they were met by a stalwart servant in the regulation dress coat and white vest. There was something sinister in the fellow's face as he barred the way to the staircase. He spoke in French.

"Why are you here?"

"This is an officer," replied the young man. "We have come to see the body of the girl who was killed here not long ago."

The servant pointed up the staircase, saying:

"We have nothing to conceal from the police. First door to the left."

The two started on up the stairs, the young fellow in the lead. Nick was watchful and ready with a revolver, which was hidden within easy reach under his coat. He understood the peril of the situation, but trusted to his usual good luck to get him out of any complications that might arise. He was now satisfied that the secret of Townsend's death lay in that house, and he was determined to uncover it.

But the detective had no opportunity to use his weapon. The forces with which he was contending were keener than he supposed. Halfway up the staircase a spray of chloroform struck him in the face, blinding him and sending him to the floor in an unconscious condition. This was a form of attack upon which he had not figured.

When he regained consciousness he was lying, securely bound as to hands and feet, on a leather couch in a room which looked like an ordinary business office. There were two windows, evidently facing a street, for the shades were drawn over the panes and inside blinds still further shut out the view. There were three doors to the room, one from the hall, through

which he concluded he had been carried, a second connecting with what must be a small front room over the lower hall, and one connecting with a rear apartment. In the matter of furniture, the room was supplied with two curtain-top desks, two swivel chairs, and the leather couch upon which the detective found himself. A gas log blazed in a grate opposite the hall door.

At first Nick's head buzzed badly, but he soon recovered. Then his eyes fell on the figure of a man sitting at a desk in the front of the room. The fellow was lean and muscular, with a large head, remarkably flat on top, and keen black eyes. As Nick looked him over he swung around in his chair.

"You are coming to, eh?" he said. "That dose would have finished an ordinary man. How are you feeling?"

"Never better," replied Nick. "You seem to be quite comfortable here."

"Yes, we are fairly well fixed here, though our London office is more luxurious."

Nick had no idea where he was. The man he was talking with looked and acted like a business man absorbed in his work. There was nothing suspicious or terrifying about the apartment. In fact, the leather thongs which bound him were the only evidences that he was not in an ordinary place of business.

"This is a new one on me," said the detective presently. "What became of the young fellow who brought me here?"

"He has gone out to see about another matter," was the reply. "Remarkable man, that. You believed him to be a reporter?"

"I certainly did not," replied Nick. "I understood that I was walking into a trap, but thought I could trust to luck."

"And you are still trusting to luck?"

"Certainly. I shall get out in some way."

"You have no idea where you are?"

"On Houston Street, I presume," replied Nick, wondering if the men he had ordered on duty had located the house he entered.

"Streets do not matter," said the other. "It is the place that counts. This looks all regular, doesn't it?"

The fellow glanced about the room with evident pride.

"It looks all right," said Nick. "What is the game?"

"It is the office of the Great Diamond Syndicate," was the reply, "or a branch office, rather, for the main establishment is in London."

"You have the Maynard diamonds here, I presume?" asked Nick.

"They are not far away," was the reply.

"The Syndicate steals diamonds, eh?" asked Nick.

"Acquires diamonds," corrected the other.

"And plans a cowardly murder now and then?" continued Nick.

"We do not consider the means," was the reply. "We look only to results. We are organized in the regular way and pay very large dividends. Men organize to secure lands and other things without paying for them. Why shouldn't we organize to acquire diamonds? We don't aim to commit violence. In fact, we are a very respectable institution. You will find us rated in the commercial agencies."

"The fellow intends to murder me," thought Nick, "else he would not be so free with the affairs of the concern."

"We have offices and agents in all the large cities," continued the fellow, "and are doing a fine business. Whenever a rare collection of gems is made, we list it. From that time we are on the lookout to *acquire* it. Let me give you an illustration of our methods. The diamonds which you call the Maynard diamonds were collected in South Africa. The collection was reported at our London office. We sent two men out to Cape Town to get them, but they did not succeed.

"The diamonds were sold to a man who shipped them to this country. Our men followed on the same ship and reported to our agent here. They got them in New York, but lost them again. One of these men was killed, the other is serving time, as you know. Then this young man Maynard got the diamonds back through your efforts. He has been followed by two of our best men for a year, so you see that the collection has cost us quite a tidy sum of money."

"Quite enterprising, I'm sure," said Nick. "How many people have you put out of the way in your quest for the Maynard diamonds?"

"I don't confess to any crime," was the reply. "I think, on the whole, that we are very considerate in our methods. Why, we acquire plenty of collections without wasting a drop of blood. There was the Harvard collection, two millions; the Gould lot, one million; the Montreville collection, half a million; the Burns lot, one million. Not a drop of blood shed, no one arrested, and the diamonds shipped away. You can see for yourself that we are doing the best we can with a peculiar business. We have our agents in all grades of society."

"Even in dramatic clubs," said Nick.

"Even in dramatic clubs," repeated the other, with

a smile. "We really enjoyed the chase after the Maynard diamonds."

"You seem to be enjoying the present situation," said Nick. "How long are you to keep me in this uncomfortable position?"

"Why, the fact is," said the other, "that we are waiting for a report from a man who was sent to your residence two hours ago. You see, you have a collection of gems which is listed at half a million in the office of the Great Diamond Syndicate in London. You have put us to so much trouble and expense that we thought best to acquire this collection, and a man has gone up after it. He is to search the steel vault off your sleeping room and all available parts of the house. If he can do so, he will accomplish his work without bloodshed, but you have trained your people to resist coercion, and there may be a fight. I sincerely hope that no member of your family will be injured.

"We are doing this thing for two reasons," continued the other. "In the first place, you were sentenced to death in London not long ago and cannot long enjoy the possession of the diamonds. In the second place, we thought best to demonstrate to you, previous to your death, that you detectives are on the whole rather cheap people. You go about with your picklock and your electric torch, and think you are the whole thing. Now you see how helpless you are in the hands of a syndicate of brainy and determined men."

"And if the man at my house does not find the diamonds?" asked Nick dryly.

"Then you will be required to write an order for their delivery to this place."

Nick shut his teeth with a snap.

"You won't, eh?" said the other. "Pardon me, but I think you will. We have means of persuasion here. What do you think of our methods by this time?"

"Of course you have planned my death?" asked Nick.

"Of course," was the reply. "Do you think I would talk so freely with a man who was to be permitted to live."

"Then, if I am to die anyway, why should I comply with your wishes in the matter of the diamonds?"

CHAPTER VII.

A DESPERATE GAME.

A sinister smile flashed over the white face of the man at the desk.

"There are many methods of executing the orders of the Great Diamond Syndicate," he said, "and there are forms of death calculated to break the most obstinate will. Besides, the safety of your beloved Chick ought to count for something with you."

The detective strained at his bonds and ground his teeth in impotent rage.

"I'd like to have half an hour with you with bare knuckles," he said, as the man at the desk gazed upon him in triumph. "I think I could teach you a few points in humanity. Let me tell you now that the American head of the Great Diamond Syndicate is not equal to his job. In short, is a very cheap fool."

"I am not a passionate person," said the other. "Proceed."

"If you were fit for the position," continued Nick, "you would never have permitted me to regain consciousness."

"We are looking to you for help in securing your diamonds," was the cool reply.

"Then, having made this mistake, you should never have confided the secrets of your syndicate to me."

"We decided to bring you down a peg or two before your death, to show you how little you were really capable of when pitted against men of ability and courage."

"To humiliate me, in fact?".

"To punish you."

"What do you suppose I'll do to your syndicate when I get out of here?" asked Nick.

"You'll never get out," was the reply. "You are as good as dead now."

Nick smiled and turned his face to the wall. He was listening intently for some indication of the presence of his assistants. He had no idea how they would get to him, but he was satisfied that get to him they would.

Presently there came a ring at the door. Nick knew by the sound that he was on the second floor of the house. He had little doubt that he was still in the house occupied wholly or in part by the African fortune teller. He was now convinced that the woman was a confederate of the diamond thieves.

Nick listened with his heart beating wildly as he heard the front door opened. He was naturally anxious about the safety of his assistants and Joseph. He had not the least doubt that the thieves had actually planned a robbery at his house. As fate would have it, there was no one in the house save Joseph, if Chick and Patsy had obeyed his telephone call. The thieves might really secure his diamonds, but that was not the chief cause of his anxiety.

"There will be a long score to settle when I get out of this," he thought.

Presently the man arose from the desk and approached the door leading into the hall. There were now loud voices out there, and Nick was listening with all his senses alert. The man opened the door a trifle.

"What is coming off out there?" he demanded, in French.

"This fool servant won't let me into the house," came a voice which sounded remarkably like that of the alleged reporter who had guided Nick to the place. It was like the young fellow's voice, and yet it was not. There was a note in it which Nick recognized. He was satisfied that it was Chick playing a desperate game.

"What is the matter, Maurice?" asked the man, standing in the doorway.

"He doesn't make correct replies," was the answer.

"I do, too! He's a fool!"

"Bring him up here and keep a strong hold on him," commanded the chief of the diamond thieves.

"I'll go up there, all right," was the reply, "but if he touches me I'll knock his head off. I ought to know all about this den, if I have fuddled my head a bit with drink, and I have been with you longer than he has."

Nick saw the chief step back to his desk and grasp a revolver.

"That is a counterfeit," he said, looking toward Nick with a smile. "It is probably one of your men trying to break into the game. We'll let him up and see what he looks like; then we'll settle him for good."

As the chief stepped back to the door Nick gave a sharp call of warning, which he knew that Chick would understand. The chief turned angrily in his direction for just an instant. In that instant there was a quick, heavy blow below and a fall. Then a cool breath of air from the street swept through the hall and up the stairs to the room where Nick lay.

The chief of the diamond thieves turned back into the room. There was a look of brutal rage on his face.

"You were right," he said. "I presumed too much on the competence of our guards. You know too much to be allowed to leave this place alive."

As he leveled his revolver at the helpless detective there came a rush on the outer staircase, and he paused, as if uncertain whether it would not be better to turn his weapon on the intruders. At that critical moment there came a sharp call for help, seemingly from the rear room, and he bounded in that direction.

"Help! I am being strangled."

The voice appeared to be that of a woman.

The would-be murderer when he reached the room whence the cry had seemed to proceed found it entirely unoccupied. With a muttered oath he sprang back to the helpless detective on the couch and again lifted his weapon.

He was too late to accomplish the murder of his prisoner. Chick, disguised as the young man who had played the part of the reporter, swept into the room and struck down the revolver. The bullet buried itself in the carpet. Behind Chick came Patsy, and Danny Nick's chauffeur, who had entered the lower hall when Chick had opened the door, after putting the guard out with a blow.

The would-be murderer disappeared in the rear room before Chick could lay hands on him, and closed the door in the faces of his pursuers. They had the barrier open in a trice, but the chief of the diamond thieves had disappeared. An open door showing a private staircase leading to the basement revealed the manner of his flight.

While the other two hastened down the staircase in hot pursuit, Chick turned back to his chief.

"Rather close call that," he said. "It is a wonder the fellow did not shoot before we could get into the room."

"His attention was attracted elsewhere," said Nick, with a smile, as Chick released him from his bonds.

"I don't understand," said the assistant. "I surely thought it was all off with you. What happened?"

"There was a call for help from the back room," said Nick, with a grin.

"I see," said Chick. "Some of your ventriloquism. Well, it saved your life, all right. What next?"

In a few words he informed Chick of the situation.

"I must get home at once," he said.

Just then Patsy and Danny made their appearance.

"It's no use," Patsy said. "The house is empty. I can't understand how they got away so handily."

"Then the game is about played out so far as this place is concerned," said Nick, "and we may as well take our departure for the present."

He made a quick inspection of the two desks, gathered the few papers they held into a package and turned to the door.

"Call the police," he said to Chick, "and leave them in charge of the building. We may have further use for some of the traps here. Wait! Here is a phone."

He called his private number and waited impatiently. At length the voice of Joseph came over the wire.

"Have you had visitors to-night?" asked Nick.

"We certainly have," came the reply, with a tinge of triumph in the tones.

"Did they get into the house?" asked Nick anxiously.

"No, sir," was the reply. "I made short work of the thieves. One was wounded and taken to the hospital, and the others escaped."

After some further conversation Nick hung up the receiver.

"This has been a bad night for the Great Diamond Syndicate," he said.

"That is a new one on me," said Chick, and in a few words Nick explained the interview with the chief of the syndicate.

"Do you think he was telling the truth?" asked the assistant.

"He was certainly correct about the attempt to rob my house," replied Nick.

"But it does not seem possible that such a syndicate as he told of could exist in this age of the world."

"There are strange things connected with criminal life," said the detective. "I can see how such an organization as he described could be made to pay large dividends, and there is no knowing what thieves will do. London is headquarters for all manner of strange syndicates as well as insurance fads. Nothing is impossible over there."

"It sounds like romance," said Chick.

"Anyway," continued Nick, "we can soon learn the truth or falsity of the fellow's statements. He will give himself away before long, for he is vain and proud of his skill in criminal work. Just imagine his telling me all about his syndicate!"

"He only wanted to show you what could be done in spite of the officers of the law," said Chick. "Besides, he sought to make you look like thirty cents, as the boys on the Bowery say."

"They are a bold lot," said Nick. "Think of their sending that young man to the hotel to bring me here! However, their scheme worked to our advantage rather than to their own. By the way, where did you get that make-up?"

"I watched the fellow at the Wisconsin, and saw you go off with him," was the reply. "I saw what you were working, and followed on as you directed. When you came in here I ducked away and got this suit. Pretty near correct, eh?"

"It is about the thing," replied Nick. "Listen!"

There was an alarm of fire in the street, and then fire apparatus stopped in front of the building. Chick opened the door to the hall and looked out. The whole place was in flames. The detectives darted toward the private staircase, seeking escape by way of the basement, but were there met by a column of flame.

Nick threw open the windows and fire ladders soon made their appearance. It was clear that the lower part of the structure was little better than a furnace.

"They hardly succeeded in burning us alive," said Chick as the four men stood on the pavement below. "That was a fool trick, it seems to me."

"The idea," said Nick, "was undoubtedly to destroy the papers and identifying records of the Great Diamond Syndicate. In this they only partially succeeded, for I have quite a mess of documents in my pocket. The house, however, seems to be doomed to destruction."

This was indeed the fact, for the building burned to the ground. It was afterward discovered that the basement had been filled with combustible material, for use in just such an emergency. It was clear to the detectives that the Great Diamond Syndicate took due care of its secrets. It is true that the chief, believing Nick Carter to be as good as dead, had talked of the syndicate to him, but he had done this principally through vanity, and with the purpose of showing how the keenest detectives of the day had been outwitted by the superior wisdom and courage of the mighty syndicate.

CHAPTER VIII.

MORE TROUBLE.

As Nick thought over, word by word, the talk of the diamond thief, he could not see that his communications had much injured the syndicate. He had informed the detective that there was such a syndicate, and that was about all. However, this was something to start with, especially as the papers of the syndicate had been captured. Indeed, Nick had already suspected the presence of a great conspiracy in the matter of the robbery. He had understood that it was not the work of one man. The discovery that the murder had been committed by a woman who wore clothing made in Paris had started this train of thought. His experiences at the house on Houston Street, independent of the admission of the chief thief, had confirmed his earlier notions.

"Well," said Nick, "they have done the best thing they could under the circumstances. This blaze scatters the American branch of the Great Diamond Syndicate. Only for the papers I have in my possession, the

very name might be something in the nature of a dream, for all the talk of the chief thief."

"Have you looked at the papers?" asked Chick.

"Just enough to discover that they really deal with the doings of some powerful syndicate," was the reply. "Unless I am very much mistaken, we shall get no names or incriminating facts from them."

"What's the next move?" asked Chick.

"I shall go to the office until morning," was the reply. "I have some work to do there, and I can get a short sleep on the couch."

"It is almost morning now."

"Well, we'll meet at the office at eight o'clock," said Nick.

And at eight o'clock Nick, Chick, and Patsy sat in the private room of the downtown office which Nick had lately taken with the object of having two headquarters from which to work.

"Now," said Nick, turning to his first assistant, "the chief thief mentioned last night by name four diamond collections which have been stolen by the syndicate. I remember the main features of the crimes, but of course I know nothing of the details. What I want you to do is to take up these cases and learn all about them. It may be that the hands of the syndicate's agents may show in some of the deals. It may be that you can trace the finger marks of one person through all the robberies. Locate all the persons, high and low, who might have taken the diamonds in each case."

Chick made a hasty note on his private memorandum and said:

"Have you been to the Wisconsin this morning?"

"I have not been out of the office," was the reply.

"You will find something doing up there," said Chick.

"Wait," said Nick, "let me get the story first hand. You turn this assignment over to Patsy and come with me to the Wisconsin."

The detectives were not long in getting to the hotel. There Nick learned of the occurrences of the night.

"Have you heard from Maynard this morning?" he asked of the night clerk, who, pale and distressed, seemingly because of what had taken place, lingered about the corridors instead of going to his room.

"He is no worse," was the reply. "I have just come from there. It seems that he recognized the people who struck him down."

"Does he mention names?"

"No; he only says: 'I know you both. Don't strike me.' Strange thing all along."

"How did the assailants get into the room?" asked Nick.

"That's what puzzles me," was the reply. "I certainly did not let them in."

"Where is the elevator boy who was on watch last night?"

"He is asleep upstairs. I told him not to leave the building."

"Bring him down."

But the elevator boy was not upstairs. He was not in the hotel at all.

"I am sorry for this," said the clerk, "because I wanted to clear myself in another matter."

Nick scented more trouble.

"What is it?" he asked.

"Well," said the clerk, evidently very much frightened, "you gave me a bundle last night and asked me to keep it until you personally came for it. Did you get it during the night?"

Nick saw what the new trouble was, and was angry, but gave no evidence of the fact.

"I did not," he replied.

"Well, the boy gave the bundle out last night. He stated that you called for it."

"At what time was it given out?"

"Quite early in the morning."

"After the assault on Maynard?"

"Yes, sir; so he said."

"Where were you?"

"I dozed off and left the boy in charge."

"Is it usual to leave a boy on watch?"

"No, sir, only——"

"Never mind that now. What did the boy say about it?"

"Just said you came after the package."

Nick was not satisfied that the clerk was telling the truth. He was very much annoyed at the loss of the clothes.

"I did not think you had been here," said the clerk, "and was angry with the boy."

"And you scolded him, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do you think he will return?"

"I do not, sir."

Nick was provoked enough to lock the clerk up, but he realized that, even if he was in partnership with the thieves, better results could be obtained by leaving him at liberty.

"Do you think he belongs to the Great Diamond Syndicate?" asked Chick, as the two walked away.

"It is all a guess," was the reply.

"I have an idea that he got that alleged reporter into the house last night," said the assistant.

CHAPTER IX.

MORE SURPRISES.

"The alleged reporter," said Nick, "was probably waiting about the house. He knew that a murder had been committed, and his orders probably were to get a line on what was being done. He might have bribed the clerk or the boy, probably he did."

"Yes, that is the story," said Chick. "The syndicate did not expect that a murder would be necessary, and those in charge of the case were alarmed. They doubtless had a notion that they would be all right if they could only get you out of the way."

"What about this Mantelle?" asked Nick.

"Do you think he is in the game?"

"He made the appointment which kept Maynard downtown with his diamonds," was the reply, "and he made it only when he knew that the diamonds were in sight."

"But he was not at the café until after Townsend left," said the assistant.

"Anyway, we'll look him up," said Nick.

"There is one thing certain," said Chick, "and that is, the case will be won if Maynard ever recovers so as to be able to give the names of the people he saw in room forty-four before he was struck down."

"We can't afford to wait for that," said Nick. "The robbers and the murderer must be caught at once if at all."

"And the diamonds?"

"I am no longer interested in the diamonds!"

This conversation had taken place, in low tones, in the hallway near to the door of room 43. The hall was deserted except for a chambermaid loitering at the farther end. It was too early for the guests to be astir.

Nick now unlocked the door to room 43 and stepped inside.

As he did so a lady who occupied room 42, directly across the hallway, opened her door and called to the maid.

She handed her a piece of silver as she came up to where she stood, leaning out into the corridor.

"Kindly go to the office and ask for mail for Mrs. Morton," she said.

The maid hastened away.

Then Mrs. Morton stepped across the hall and stood before the door of room 43.

Nick had not yet left the door, but was standing close to it on the inside. As the woman approached he listened for a moment and then opened the door.

The woman started back in dismay.

"Something you want?" asked Nick, with a smile.

The woman, who was young and far from ill-looking, blushed prettily.

"I'm ashamed of myself," she said, "but I really wanted to know what was going on in the murder case, and so I listened. I'm sorry."

"It doesn't matter," replied Nick.

The woman sought her room and Nick turned back to his assistant.

"There is a clever crook," he said.

"I wonder how she got here so soon?" remarked Chick.

"You might go down and talk with the clerk," said Nick. "I'll wager that she came here after the assault on Maynard."

While Nick made a second and more searching examination of the room, Chick talked with the night clerk, who still insisted on hanging about the place.

"The woman came here from the Grand Central depot in a carriage at seven-thirty," said the clerk. "She registered from Chicago, as you see. No, there was no mail for her when the maid called. What other errand did she give the maid?"

"None whatever," replied the assistant. "At least none that we heard."

"Well," said the clerk, "after making the inquiry at the desk the maid went out to the café next to the reading room and talked with one of the waiters."

"You'll not lose by giving out that information," said Chick.

Before the astonished clerk could make reply, Chick was upstairs in the room Nick was searching.

"We are in a storm centre of the Great Diamond Syndicate," said Nick, when informed of the acts of the maid. "This is a fine place to fish for clues."

"But how can the maid be in the employ of the syndicate?" asked Chick. "Up to this time the thieves have had no use for any one in this house."

"We'll pass on that when the time comes," said Nick. "See what I found in this room."

The detectives were standing in room 44.

"Red hair," said Chick.

"Look at it with this glass."

Chick did so.

"What do you find?" asked Nick.

"Bleached," was the short reply.

"Exactly!"

Nick took more red hairs from his pocketbook.

"I find," he said, "that these are from a wig."

"Where did you get those?"

"In room 43, last night. They were in the brush and on the collar of the coat the murderer wore."

"And these hairs were found in this room?"

"There on the carpet."

"And that means——"

"That the woman who committed the murder came back here and tried to find out what was going on. She found the room deserted, and entered."

"There were two of them," said Chick, pointing to a lock of black curly hair on the floor, "and one was a man and Maynard grappled with him."

"Exactly," said Nick, "and some one let her in, or let them in, rather."

"And that some one knew that Maynard was being murdered!"

"It's a puzzle," replied Nick. "I can't for the life of me see how the Great Diamond Syndicate got into action here so quickly."

"Money," said Chick.

"I guess the chief thief didn't exaggerate much when he told me of the efficiency of his gang," said Nick.

The detective made a little package of the articles he wished to take with him and the two descended to the office floor. The night clerk was nowhere in sight. The day clerk was all attention.

"A strange thing has just happened," he said. "Our night elevator boy was badly injured near here by the falling of a heavy jar from a high window. He had been out on some errand, it seems, and was returning."

"Do you know when he left the hotel?" asked Nick.

"Before I came on watch."

"Do you think he was returning to the hotel?"

"I don't know about that. He might not have been."

"Where was the boy taken?"

"To a hospital not far from the scene of the accident," was the reply.

The detectives hurried to the place where the boy had been injured and learned from the officer on the beat the name of the institution to which the boy had been taken.

In a short time Nick and Chick stood in a private room of the establishment, making an examination of the clothing worn by the boy, who had not yet recovered consciousness.

For a time they searched in vain.

Then, at the front of the coat, appeared a narrow slit. In this was a folded paper bearing an address and the one word:

"Scatter!"

It seemed impossible to ascertain where the boy had put in his time between the hour of leaving the hotel and the hour of his disaster.

The address was that of a cheap lodging house off the Bowery, but little could be learned there.

The tough clerk said that the boy had talked with one or two lodgers, and gone away.

"A warning from the syndicate," said Chick. "They are up to date in their methods, it appears."

There was silence between the two as they walked back to the house from which the jar had fallen.

"It was intended murder," said Chick. "Just a cold-blooded crime."

"Well?"

"The syndicate had bribed him and used him, and were afraid he would not keep his tongue between his teeth," said Chick.

"Don't jump at conclusions," said Nick. "Accidents of this sort are not uncommon in New York."

"Are you going to the room from which the jar fell?" asked the assistant.

"Right now," was the reply. "We may be able to get some sort of information from the people of the building."

"The Great Diamond Syndicate may have gotten ahead of us," said Chick. "Say, but that must be a hot concern. They burn houses and try to knock out whoever gets in their way. I wonder if anything will eventually happen to that smart chambermaid?"

CHAPTER X.

BY THE HAND OF A WOMAN.

The detectives approached the building from the opposite side of the street, keeping their eyes on the third-story windows. The officer saw them and approached.

"I thought you'd come back," he said. "It's a case worth looking up. I could get no satisfaction up there. Had to return to my beat too quick."

"Did you see the jar fall?" asked Nick.

"I did not," was the reply, "but a woman who was passing said it was thrown from the second window on

the right of the entrance, third floor. She said she saw a head and an arm out of the window as the jar fell."

"What do they say up there?"

"That the room is not occupied."

"What sort of folks are in that building?"

The policeman shrugged his shoulders.

"Tough," he said.

"Well, we are going up," said Nick.

"I'll wait about here," said the officer, who knew Nick and his assistant quite well. "Let me know if anything happens."

The two passed on up the stairs. They had, however, been seen talking with the policeman. As they reached the third floor a rough voice asked:

"What do you fellows want up here? You'd better be making yourself scarce if you want to keep your shape."

The speaker was meanly dressed and generally foul in appearance.

"I take it," said Nick coolly, "that you are the janitor."

"What is it to you who I am?" demanded the other. "Get out!"

Nick turned to his assistant.

"Call the policeman," he said. "We'll cool this chap off in jail."

"What have I done?" whined the janitor, seeing that he had made a mistake.

"You might have thrown that jar down on the boy, for all I know," said Nick, with a wink at Chick.

"What would I do such a thing for?" asked the frightened janitor.

"For money," replied the detective.

"Was it a murder?" asked the janitor, trembling.

"It looks like it might be before long."

"Then the woman did it!" said the janitor.

"The woman?" repeated Nick. "What woman?"

"Why," was the reply, "the woman who rented the room yesterday, and who went off just a little while ago."

"Just after the boy was killed?"

"Yes, not five minutes after."

"What sort of a woman was it?"

"Oh, I didn't notice her particularly. One of the sort that live here, I take it," answered the janitor.

"Young or old?"

"Middle-aged, I guess."

"Did you rent the room to her?"

"Yes, yesterday afternoon."

"What did she say about her occupation?"

"I asked no questions, sir. It is not always best to do so."

"Well, give us a look at the room."

The place was small, and cheap, and dirty. In the way of furniture it contained only a flat bed, a spotted washstand, a chair and an old dresser. The detectives sent the janitor away, much to his disappointment, and made a careful study of the place.

"Here's more red hair," said Chick. "I wonder if this is bleached?"

Examination showed that it was. Nick took several articles from the closet and the top of the dresser and carried them away with him.

"If the room was hired for the purpose of getting rid of the boy," said Chick, as the detectives walked away, "why should it have been taken yesterday? The boy was not in the game at that time."

"He was sent along that street because the window was there with a murderous heart behind it. The room was not hired because there was a plot against the boy at that time. Presently we shall doubtless know why it was engaged and who the tenant was."

"The whole case is a wonder," said Chick. "I confess that I don't know what to make of it. And it seems to me that we are not progressing very rapidly."

There was an inscrutable smile on the face of the detective as he asked:

"What's your notion of getting on with a case?"

"Why, getting a clue to work on."

"You don't see one here?"

"Why, there's a woman with bleached hair, and a young man who calls himself a detective, and the chief of the Great Diamond Syndicate, and all that, but we don't know where to look for them."

"There are two women with red hair," said Nick, with a laugh.

"Two?"

"Exactly."

"Then the woman who killed Townsend did not occupy that room back there?"

"I think not."

"Hair is different, eh?"

"That's the idea."

"Well, there's the chief of the syndicate. We know he exists, but how are we to get to him?"

"They will all come in a bunch, like sheep," said Nick, "and the Great Diamond Syndicate will be wiped off the continent."

"You've got me guessing," said Chick.

At noon the two detectives found themselves at Maynard's bedside.

He was unconscious, and talking wildly.

"Has he mentioned any names?" asked Nick of the nurse.

"Not a single one."

Then Nick turned to the doctor.

"Will he live?" he asked.

"I think so. He is young and strong, and may recover, but he may have to learn his alphabet again."

"That is another trade-mark of the Great Diamond Syndicate," mused Nick. "Hartley, who was one of their American agents, advocated beating people on the head until they came from the hospital mere imbeciles."

Things looked suspiciously favorable to the syndicate at that time. As Chick had stated, there was no clue to the whereabouts of the persons wanted. Maynard was unconscious and the elevator boy was in the same condition.

On leaving the sick room, Nick hastened to the Townsend residence.

It was a sad-faced family he met there, and for a time he delayed the important questions he had come to ask. It seemed like making little of their sorrow to trouble his parents with matters of the law at that time. Finally he called the father aside.

"You understand how difficult it is for me to break in on you at this time," he said, "but there are questions which ought to be asked now."

"I will do my best to answer them," said the father.

"You have heard your son speak of one Julius Mantelle?"

"Occasionally."

"Do you know where the fellow lives?"

"At the Hotel Cumberland, I think."

"Have you ever met this man Julius?"

"Once."

"Describe him, please."

"Very dark, with broad nostrils, like a negro, thick lips, black curly hair. He speaks English with a slight French accent. I didn't like the looks of the man."

"What about his eyes?"

"Like a snake's."

"Did you know that your son had an appointment with him last night?"

"I did not."

"Or with any one?"

"Not that I knew of. Is this man Mantelle suspected?"

"Well, he was about the café where your son and Maynard took supper after the rehearsal. I desire to locate him. Do you know where this rehearsal was held?"

The detective was given a number of West Fourteenth Street.

CHAPTER XI.

MANTELLE AT BAY.

"It strikes me," said Chick, as the detectives left the Townsend home, "that the Great Diamond Syndicate is giving us the fight of our lives."

"It appears to be all that the chief declared it to be," said Nick, "a powerful organization, officered by cunning scoundrels."

"I think this man Mantelle knows something about the syndicate."

"We have no proof, yet I have been thinking that same thing," replied Nick, "and that is why I went to the Townsend home, to see if it were possible to get a line on the fellow. I did not succeed very well, but I have another plan in my mind."

"Hunt him up and work the third degree?" asked Chick.

"Exactly," replied the chief. "If I can get up an argument with him, or place him under accusation, I can form an estimate that will guide me."

"There might be a little physical exertion connected with an interview in which he was accused of complicity in the murder," said Chick, "and that would help some. I am feeling in the need of a thumping."

"That may come soon enough," replied Nick.

"It might be a good idea to watch the room in the tenement," said Chick. "There may be a reason why the woman should go back there."

"If she does, it will be in the nighttime," was the reply. "We will talk that over later. At this time we'll see if we can locate this man Mantelle. No one appears to know much about the fellow."

"He may be at the Cumberland," said Chick.

Mantelle was not at his hotel when the detectives called there, and so they went to the Bowery café, whence Townsend had gone to his death.

"Now," said Nick, as they approached the place, "if we find him and there are others present, you observe them while I am sizing up Mantelle. And I may accuse him of all sorts of things, so be on your guard."

The clerk informed Nick that Mantelle was at breakfast with a friend in a rear room.

"Are you certain he has company?" asked Nick. "You see, he had an appointment with me at this

hour—an important appointment. It is possible that the other fellow is the man we both expected to meet here. What sort of a looking chap is he?"

"It is a woman," said the man at the desk, "and he asked particularly that they should not be disturbed."

"Oh, he'll see me," said Nick, with a swagger affected by precinct detectives.

"You'll have to get in there the best way you can, then," said the clerk. "I am not going to have you shown in."

"Oh, that's all right," said Nick.

The clerk gave the detectives the number of the room and they opened the door and entered without even the formality of knocking. Mantelle sprang to his feet, rage showing in his eyes. His companion, who hastily dropped a veil over her face as the door was opened, shrank back into her chair and turned her head away.

She was slender of figure, and seemed to be rather good-looking. Owing to the thick veil, Nick could not distinguish the full outlines of her face, but what he could see of it gave him the impression that the woman was young and fair of complexion. There was something about the droop of the shoulders, the graceful lines of the waist, which seemed familiar to the detective, yet he could not at that time place the woman.

"What do you want in here?" demanded Mantelle, springing from his chair. "Have you no eyes? Can't you see that the room is taken?"

"Just a moment," said Nick, with the precinct detective swagger. "I'm a police detective, you know."

"No, I don't know," replied the other hotly, "but if you are, what is that to me? Have the kindness to leave the room."

Chick was looking on in amused wonder. He had never seen his chief play that rôle before.

"I have business with you," said Nick, taking a chair.

It seemed to Nick that a shade of anxiety passed over the man's face.

"Well, proceed. What is it?"

"You were here with Townsend and Maynard last night when the latter was murdered?" asked the detective.

"You are wrong," was the reply. "You don't know what you are talking about."

"You were not here that night?" asked Nick.

"Yes, I was here, but not with Mr. Townsend. He had left the place before I arrived, and I found Maynard waiting for him."

"You did not see Townsend that night?" asked Nick, regarding the fellow keenly.

Mantelle hesitated. He looked like a man who was playing for time.

"I was told that you saw him out on the pavement in front of this place," said Nick, at a venture.

"Well, what if I did? I do not at this time recall the incident, if I did see him, but what of it if I did?"

"I am also informed," said Nick, still making a bluff, "that you saw him pass down the street without making your presence known. Is that true?"

"It is not true," was the reply.

"We have information at headquarters," continued Nick, "that you walked on to the Wisconsin in his wake, and returned to the café only after the cry that a murder had been committed had been raised in the hotel."

"That is not true," said Mantelle.

"You did not go to the Wisconsin that night?" asked the detective.

"I did not," was the reply.

"When you left here, leaving Maynard to look up his friend, where did you go?"

"That is no affair of yours," was the angry reply.

Nick was doing a lot of guessing in his talk with the fellow, but he seemed to be making points.

"Didn't you go to the house of an African fortune teller on Houston Street?" asked the detective.

"It is a lie!" almost shouted Mantelle. "What does all this questioning mean? Am I accused of the murder of Townsend? If so, take me to some competent person for examination. I am sick of your amateur efforts."

"All in good time," said Nick. "After the destruction by fire of the house occupied by the African fortune teller, didn't you visit a woman on the third floor of a tenement house near the Bowery?"

Mantelle started. The woman sitting by his side seemed about to leave her chair, so excited and nervous were her movements. Chick began to see that his chief was no longer feeling around for a clue, but knew what he was about.

"I did not visit such a place as you describe," was the reply. "From this café I went directly to my rooms at the Cumberland."

"How did you get to your rooms?" asked Nick, at a venture. "The elevator man says you did not ride up in the cage with him."

Again the fellow started, as if in sudden terror, again the woman made a motion which suggested leaving the room. Nick was now playing a bold game.

"He is mistaken," said Mantelle. "I went to my room in the usual manner."

"And the lady sitting there by your side," said Nick, "she——"

"Leave her out of it," said Mantelle angrily.

"——she met you later that night—or early the next morning, rather, at——"

The woman sprang to her feet, her eyes flashing through her veil.

"I won't stay here to be insulted!" she said.

She started for the door, but Nick stopped her with a gesture.

"Wait," he said. "Are you the woman who occupied a room on the third story of a tenement on East Houston Street?"

"Let me pass," cried the woman, as Nick stepped in front of her. "I can account for myself to the proper authorities, but not to you."

In her rage the woman drew herself up to her full height and gazed at the detective, with a fierce hate burning in her eyes.

"It may be as well for you to remain here and answer a few questions, but you may go if you think best," said Nick.

"What do you want?" demanded the woman.

"This: When did you first meet Julius Mantelle?"

Mantelle now sprang to his feet.

"This is intolerable!" he cried.

"I am not detaining you," said Nick.

Mantelle and the woman turned to the door.

"A nice mess you have made of my morning," Julius said.

CHAPTER XII.

FLUSHING THE BIRDS.

A waiter approached, a tall, dark, slim fellow, with evident traces of African blood in his veins. He stepped impudently in front of the detective as they followed Julius and the woman from the room. His manner was insulting in the extreme.

"How did you get into that room?" he demanded.

Nick sized up the situation instantly. Some of their conversation had been overheard, and this waiter had been set on to detain them while the man and woman got away. Either that, or assault, perhaps murder, was intended. It was clear that he had made progress during his talk with Mantelle.

Without replying to the impudent question of the waiter, Nick motioned him to step aside, and advanced toward the public room, which lay at the end of a wide hall upon which the private room opened. At the rear of the hall was a wide door opening on an alley. The waiter did not move. He still obstructed the way. Julius and the woman were passing through the outer room toward the street door.

"You had no right in there," continued the waiter, angry at the way he was ignored, "and I have a notion to throw you out into the alley."

"Mention of the Townsend murder appears to stir things up in this house," said the detective, looking the waiter in the eye.

For a second the fellow looked dismayed, but only for a second. Other waiters were now gathering in the hall. The clerk advanced to the scene of trouble.

"We can't have quarreling here," he said. "You go back to your work," he added, addressing the waiters, "and you," to the detectives, "make your way out as quietly as possible. I told you not to go into that room."

"At any rate," thought Nick, "the clerk is not in with this play, whatever it is."

"He can't come in here and insult my customers," said the waiter, ignoring the protests of the clerk. "I'll pitch him into the alley."

"The alley is probably half full of bullies," thought Nick, "and I have no time for a battle now. The waiter is in touch with the syndicate."

The waiter seized Nick by the shoulder and hurried him along toward the alley door, and Nick went without resistance. He wanted to see what there was in the alley.

Another waiter seized Chick and moved forward with him. It seemed to be the idea to separate the two men. Chick waited until the alley door was opened and then landed a blow on the waiter which laid him unconscious on the floor.

Through the doorway leading to the alley the assistant had observed three muscular men waiting for Nick to be passed out to them! Surely the detective had had good cause to begin a line of inquiries at this place!

In a moment Chick was at the side of his chief, who was still inside the restaurant. There was a rush for the place, half a dozen waiters swarming about the two detectives. Chick saw iron knuckles in more than one hand, and understood that the intention was to knock them both out.

As he approached he saw Nick whirl suddenly about, land a knock-out blow on the waiter's jaw and make toward the front of the place. Two waiters were now down, and all was excitement, but no one opposed the exit of the detectives. Two of their crack men had been knocked out, and that was enough to warn the others to be careful. At the door Nick beckoned to a policeman, a roundsman who knew him well.

"I had to do a little hitting in there," he said to the policeman. "Go in and take the two men you will find suffering from too much impudence. Lock them up and keep them apart and away from visitors."

The roundsman saluted and passed into the restaurant.

"Now," said Nick, "we may as well learn where Julius and the woman go."

"I'm afraid they're out of sight," said Chick.

"No, they were waiting to see us beaten to a pulp," replied Nick. "They have just left the stairway there at the left and turned the corner. Keep along after them and track them home. If they separate, follow the woman."

Chick hastened away and Nick made his way to his office, where he found Patsy awaiting him.

"I have looked up the details of the four diamond robberies," said the assistant, "and here is the report."

He handed his chief a typewritten roll of at least 20,000 words. Nick glanced at the length of the document and asked:

"How many hands show plainly in these jobs?"

"One in the last three," was the reply.

"And all these are of recent occurrence?"

"Yes, of very recent occurrence."

"And the proof points to a woman?"

"Exactly."

"What sort of a woman?"

"A lady's maid."

"Describe her."

Patsy laughed as he replied:

"That would be a hard thing for me to do, though my wife Adelina might satisfy you. Sometimes she is young and fair. Again, she is old and wrinkled. Now she has abundant black hair, now she has short auburn locks. She seemed to be an expert at disguises, for no one suspected her."

"Yet you are certain of your ground?"

"Certainly. The face does not always do its duty when disguised. There are features which cannot be changed by art. This girl has a small mole on the right upper lip, just at the corner of the nostril."

"That is a very common face blemish."

"Exactly, but this girl has tried to secure the removal of this blemish, and it has resented the interference. It is inflamed and is growing in size."

"What else?"

"She is young."

"How do you know that?"

"She looks it. She can't be over twenty."

"Where did she appear as a young woman?"

"At the Burns house."

"Go on."

"She is slender, and has a fancy for diamonds."

"Go on."

"Just now she is not in evidence. No one seems to know where she is."

"You did not unnecessarily attract attention to her?"

"Oh, no. She is not supposed to be suspected. I was looking after a long-lost sister."

"Can you ascertain where she put in her extra time while out at service?"

"I have already done so. She was infatuated with the stage. She went to the theatres, and sought the companionship of actors and actresses. She informed the servants at the Burns house that she was in training for the stage."

"She may be behind the footlights now."

"I can't find her at any of the theatres."

"Well," said the detective, "about ten o'clock tonight I may be able to point her out to you. Remain here for the present."

In an hour a call from Chick came over the phone. He was in a room opposite a private parlor at the Cumberland.

"Our parties are across the hall," he said, "and they seem to be holding a reception. About a dozen people in there now and more coming."

"What sort of people?"

"Pretty good looking lot. Look like hotel clerks, restaurant owners, and race-horse fellows of the better class."

"Mantelle master of ceremonies?"

"He appears to be."

"Any way of learning what they are talking about?"

"I can't get a single word."

"Is Julius dressed just as he was this afternoon at the café?"

"Exactly."

"All right. I'll be up there in a short time."

Nick rang off and made up a bundle from the clothing stored in his dressing room. Then he turned to Patsy.

"You saw the clothes I put up?" he asked.

"Certainly."

"Well, if you see me in that rig, follow on, wherever I go. Perhaps you would better get on your messenger rig. You can go anywhere in that, in the part of the city where I am going."

Patsy hastened away to prepare his change of apparel. Nick regarded his own disguise ruefully. It was without doubt necessary in this case, but he disliked to go about in the guise of another man. He preferred to win his cases by reasoning them out rather than by cheap detective methods.

As soon as Patsy was ready Nick took up his bundle with a sigh and the two made their way to the Cumberland, Patsy following along on the opposite side of the street.

"Step into the corridor and note the room I am shown to," said Nick, waiting for the seeming messenger to come up with him at the entrance to the hotel. "After I have been in there a minute, tell the clerk you have a message for the man in that room. Come in armed and ready for a scrap."

"A scrap at the Cumberland?" echoed Patsy.

"We can't tell what will happen," replied Nick.

It was now growing dark, and when Nick entered the room where Chick awaited him, the gas was burning dimly.

In a moment the detective had his clothes off and was dressing himself in the ones brought from his office. As the work progressed, Patsy knocked at the door and was admitted.

Directly, Nick stood before his assistants ready for action.

It seemed to them that it was Mantelle who stood there.

"It is a hard rôle to play," said Nick, "because it is difficult to hold my face as Mantelle carries his. Anything wrong?"

"Not a thing!" said Chick.

"You look like the original," said Patsy.

"Now," said Nick, "I'd like to get in there and hear the talk, but I do not care to risk it, as a failure would ruin all my plans."

"What's the game?" asked Patsy.

"We'll have to remain here until they leave," was the reply.

"That may be at midnight."

"Yes, but we must wait."

"And then?"

"When we see that they are going, the messenger steps out and invites Mantelle into this room."

"And we put him to sleep, and you step out in his place?"

"That's it."

"It's a risky thing to do," said Chick.

Nick remained silent.

CHAPTER XIII.

A CLEVER WOMAN.

"There is no knowing where the trail may lead you," Chick said presently.

"I am in hope," said Nick, "that it will lead again to the headquarters of the Great Diamond Syndicate. I have an idea that I would like a short talk with the man I met in the Houston Street house last night."

"I wonder what's become of the alleged reporter?" asked Chick. "He appeared to me to be rather an amusing chap."

"You'll probably find him with the old duffer who entertained Nick last night," suggested Patsy. "Listen! I think they are passing out."

The people in the private parlor were indeed leaving the room, one at a time, and quietly. There was no talking in the hall, and the door was closed after every departure. Nick smiled at the game he was playing.

"These syndicate fellows are all right," he said. "It is something worth while when you get up against fellows who meet at first-class hotels instead of in some dark basement in the slums!"

The door to the private room opened and closed again. Nick, who was at the transom, motioned and Patsy slipped out into the hall and stood some distance from the door.

"There are only two left in the room now," said Nick. "They are Mantelle and a woman."

Again the door opened, and Mantelle stepped out. The woman was a few paces behind him, but still in the room.

Patsy stepped forward from the other end of the hall.

"I was just going to the parlor, sir," he said. "I have a message for you."

"Deliver it," said Julius shortly.

"A call, rather," said Patsy, correcting his mistake. "Well?"

"It is a request to call at room fourteen. That is it, there at the right."

Julius made a motion with his hand and the woman closed the door of the private parlor. He then stepped up to the door of 14 and knocked lightly on the panel.

"You asked for me?" he said, as Chick opened the door.

Nick was nowhere in sight. The messenger followed on as Julius stepped into the room.

It all took place in a second, and Mantelle lay bound, gagged and panting on the carpet.

"That was quietly done," said Nick, stepping out of a closet. "I was afraid the noise might attract attention."

Mantelle almost foamed with rage as he saw Nick, dressed so exactly like himself that it would seem that his best friends must be deceived.

Chick mounted a chair and looked through the transom.

"You must be going," he said presently. "The woman in the parlor is becoming anxious and keeps opening the door a crack."

Nick bent over Mantelle, lying helpless on the floor, and took a peculiar-looking pin from his scarf. Then he took a diamond ring from the prisoner's little finger.

Mantelle squirmed under his bonds, but could not resist.

"I can use these to good advantage," said Nick. "And, by the way, Mantelle, I think I have seen these before."

The prisoner looked as if a little cursing would relieve his mind, but he did not at that time have the power to make a loud sound.

"The woman is at the door," said Chick.

Nick opened the door and stepped out into the hall.

"I was detained a moment in that room," he said, as the woman advanced to meet him.

Julius foamed as he realized how exactly the voice reproduced his own.

"Looks all right, doesn't he?" asked Chick, as he closed the door. "Now, when they get to the end of the hall, Patsy, you follow on and I'll see that this fellow is locked up."

Patsy moved away, and was soon in full view of Nick and his companion. They were standing in front of a clothing house, and the woman was urging him to make some purchases.

The woman had apparently not even glanced at Nick as he appeared in the hall in the guise of Mantelle. She had walked at his side until they were clear of the hotel without speaking. Now she said:

"It is plain that we must leave the city for a time."

"I presume so," said Nick.

The woman walked along in silence while Nick wondered what was coming next. He saw no reason for sudden flight on the part of the members of the syndicate, that is unless they had learned something of his plans.

"I don't see why that police detective suspected you," continued the woman. "Why don't you change your clothes and make yourself look different? You poke around in that black suit, looking like a preacher. Fix your hair different, and put on a sporty air. You look too solemn."

"I must go back to my room to do that," said Nick, realizing that this was just the thing he ought to do—get to Mantelle's rooms. But it was not in the mind of the woman that he should reach that suite of rooms.

"Here is a clothing store," she said. "Go in and buy what you need. You must not go back to the rooms now. The hotel is probably watched. It's a wonder we all got away from there as we did after the meeting. You buy what you need here and I'll wait in the front of the store. Change your appearance as much as possible."

Nick was sorely puzzled. Why should the woman want him to change his clothes? She understood that the officers knew Mantelle, and that they would find him if they wanted to do so in whatever suit he might put on. Was it her purpose to escape when he went

into the store to change his clothes? That was a risk he could not run, and he hesitated at the store door. Then a messenger in uniform paused at the door, looked at the number, and passed on.

"That's Patsy, all right," thought Nick, "here's for the new clothes. She can't get away so long as he is here. This is a mystery, but I'll solve it!"

Nick selected a large light-colored suit and put it on over the Mantelle disguise. The hat he retained, for he could not very well conceal the derby he had worn. When he left the dressing room he seemed like another person. The woman looked pleased, and asked where the other clothes were.

"I have them where I can get them again," was the reply.

Once more in the street, the woman turned at the corner of Houston and walked in the direction of the East River. She seemed strangely agitated over something, and more than once Nick thought she was laughing immoderately.

The detective began to think he had caught a Tartar. At least, he could not make up his mind as to what was coming off next.

The house she presently entered was in the same block with the ruins of the burned headquarters of the Great Diamond Syndicate.

She led the way up a staircase and entered a suite of rooms which faced the street. Closing the door, she laid aside her hat and coat and faced the detective with a smile.

She was a handsome woman, tall, slender, and fair of face, but certainly not the one Nick had seen at the café with Mantelle. She said:

"Well, Mr. Nick Carter!"

Nick sprang back, but before he could draw a weapon he found himself looking into the muzzle of a loaded revolver. The woman certainly had the drop on him! Then a young man came from an inner room and took the revolver while the woman went through the form of securing Nick's wrists. The detective did not resist. He knew that he could release himself from his bonds at any time. They were not of the kind used by the chief of the Great Diamond Syndicate.

This accomplished, the woman stepped back and looked the detective over contemptuously.

"You thought I wouldn't recognize you?" she asked.

"I certainly did," was the reply. "How did you account for my wearing Mantelle's jewelry?"

"I imagined what had taken place in room fourteen. You are a man of action, Mr. Carter, but you have your failings. You neglected to give the sign when we met in the hall."

"I was wondering if there were signs and grips," said Nick. "Rather a clever lot of thieves and murderers."

"Don't become coarse," said the woman. "Of course we have signs and grips."

Then Nick recalled a sign Mantelle had made at the café when the waiters came to the private room. It was nothing more than dropping the left hand straight at the side and pointing down with the index finger, the others being closed.

Nick knew that he was in no little peril. It was true that he could cast off his bonds at any time, and might even be able to outwit the woman and her companion, but he knew well enough that other members of the syndicate were about.

"Are you waiting for some one?" asked Nick, as the woman walked about the room.

"Yes; I am waiting for Mantelle," was the reply.

"You will find him in the Tombs," said Nick.

"Your plans do not appear to be working to perfection in this case," said the woman mockingly. "Mantelle will be rescued on the way to prison."

"And when he arrives here?"

"Then you will be executed. We shall take no more chances. Do you know that you have given us more trouble than any dozen men ever did."

"Executed," repeated the detective. "You use a fine word to describe the crime of murder."

"Executed is the word. You were condemned to death a long time ago."

Nick glanced about the room. There seemed to be no way out except by the door at which he had entered. The woman noticed his scrutiny of the place and said:

"Oh, we have taken good care that you shall not slip us again. Even if you could get out of the room, you would be killed in the street. Our men are warned and are anxious to dispose of you."

"It seems to me," said Nick, "that I have heard talk something like that before, and in this case, too. Is it the habit of the syndicate to explain its plans to prisoners who are condemned to death? You appear to me to be quite frank in your statements."

"The chief made a mistake in talking to you last night, or this morning, rather," replied the woman. "It made us no end of trouble to-day."

The woman arose and walked to the window. To the detective she seemed to be getting nervous.

"Do you know," said Nick presently, "that I think you are putting up a bluff, and that you are talking against time. Is Mantelle late?"

"He'll be here," was the reply.

"It would be something of a consolation to me," said Nick, "to know just how you managed to scatter the news of my capture. The others were gone when we left the hotel, before you suspected me, and you have talked with no one since we started."

The woman laughed heartily.

"What do you suppose I got you into that clothing store for, and into the dressing room? I am agreeably disappointed in you. I thought you much keener."

"Then you discovered my identity at once, in the hotel, and summoned your friends while I was changing my clothes? That's clever! What a capital detective you would have made. I should not have left you alone for an instant. You might have escaped. But, then, we all make mistakes."

Nick waited anxiously, half expecting the woman to mention the presence of Patsy while she sat at the front of the store. Patsy had certainly been there, but had the woman noted his presence? It was a consolation to the detective to know that the assistant was not far off.

"I was afraid you would escape," laughed the woman. "You took the hook easily, Mr. Carter."

"You are a clever woman," replied Nick. "I give you the credit of getting the best of me up to date. What next, if I may ask?"

"If you could look out of this window," said the woman, facing Houston Street, "you would see three men lounging in front of a saloon. They are waiting for signals from this room. Do you begin to realize what a power the Great Diamond Syndicate is? When the waving of a red handkerchief announces that you are dead they will go away. But they won't expect that signal until they see Mantelle enter the house."

The detective had no doubt that Patsy was also watching the windows of that house. He would have given much to have communicated with him for an instant.

He arose as if to walk to the window. The young man who held the revolver moved forward into the front room.

"Get back to your chair," he said, "or we won't wait for Mantelle. I prefer to do the job right now, anyway. Get back!"

The fellow's tone nettled the detective. Almost before he realized what he was doing, he burst his bonds and sprang at the fellow. There was a sharp report and a puff of smoke.

Then the woman, who had turned from the window in alarm, saw the young man lying unconscious on the floor and saw, also, that the detective was no longer bound.

Nick gazed at the woman steadily for a second.

"I don't know what to do with you," he said. "It is not the office of a gentleman to bind and gag a woman, yet something must be done."

The woman gazed anxiously in the direction of the door.

"Don't expect Mantelle," said Nick. "He is in the Tombs by this time."

Then a step sounded in the hall outside.

"He is coming!" cried the woman.

Nick lifted his revolver.

"I hope so," he said.

The woman gave a scream of warning.

Then the door opened and a messenger's uniform showed in the opening.

Patsy was evidently in great haste, and closed the door after him with a bang.

"Those fellows across the street are suspicious," he said. "I should not have made a break to get up here except for the pistol shot. Are you hurt?"

"Not in the least," replied Nick. "Are the watchers coming up here?"

"They started across the street just behind me."

"Watch the woman!"

Nick sprang to the front window. The red silk handkerchief lay in a chair, ready for use as a signal.

Nick lifted the lower sash and threw the end out to the breeze. It floated for a second in the strong light of the street, and then Nick dropped it. As it fluttered to the pavement below the detective caught an exclamation of joy from a group of three men standing at the very entrance to the house.

"There you are," said Nick, turning back into the room with a smile. "I am now dead, and our three cutthroats will go away. How are you feeling now, madam?" he added, speaking to the woman, who had thrown herself into a chair and sat looking at the two men with rage and hate in her eyes.

While Patsy watched the prisoner, Nick made a search of the rooms.

He found letters and telegrams by the score. His conclusion was that the Great Diamond Syndicate was using the rooms as headquarters.

As he opened a locked drawer in a small secretary the woman sprang to her feet and fought desperately.

"They are private papers there," she cried. "If you are a gentleman, let them alone. Let them alone, I tell you!"

"Private papers!" echoed Nick. "I should say so! The private papers of the Great Diamond Syndicate! This is indeed a find!"

The woman fell back on the floor in a faint.

"This looks like easy money!" smiled Patsy, with a grin.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE STORY TOLD.

The Booth Dramatic Club was holding rehearsal at its rooms on West Fourteenth Street. The rooms were on the top floor of an old-fashioned house, and were nicely fitted up with stage, dressing room and scenery.

The play long in rehearsal was to have been presented to the intimate friends of the members of the club that night, but the death of Townsend, the illness of Maynard, and the strange disappearance of two young men who held leading parts had made a postponement necessary.

There was a stage entrance from a hall which ran along the east side of the house, and at eight o'clock Nick Carter, in the guise of Mantelle, passed through the hall and stepped out on the stage. He was accompanied by Patsy, who carried a large suit case.

"I wonder which is my dressing room?" whispered Nick.

Patsy looked amused. The two detectives had run many risks in getting into the house and up to the rooms of the club, but the test now seemed at hand.

"Well," said the assistant, "you've got a leading rôle, according to the programme we found, and you must have a fine dressing room. Wait! I'll just scout

around and find a room with your stage costume in it. If I make a mistake no one will wonder at it, while they would suspect something at once if you got into the wrong room.

"There," said Patsy, returning in a moment. "I've located the place and the rig. I hope you'll make a hit in your part to-night! You wear a wig and all that, so no one will suspect you. What luck! Sure I don't play anything? Well, then, I'll be your servant for the night and sit in the dressing room and watch."

Nick dressed in the costume he wore in the play and went out on the stage. Half a dozen of the members were there, and he nodded at them all, giving the sign with the left hand. They were all too busy with their own affairs to pay special attention to him.

Presently a dressing-room door opened and a woman stepped out, clad in silks and blazing with diamonds. She approached Nick, who was glad that at the moment he stood in the shadow of a scene ready for adjustment.

The girl was Bernice Bouvé, who had once planned to steal the Maynard diamonds, and even attempted the life of the detective. She looked more beautiful than ever in her costume. In a moment Anton Sawtelle stood at her side.

Sawtelle had been implicated in the previous attempt on the Maynard diamonds, and had also previously served a term at Sing Sing.

Townsend had warned Maynard against both Bernice and Anton on the night they met at the café from which Townsend had gone to his death.

"Where is Stella?" asked Bernice, laying a hand on Nick's arm. "She should have been here long ago."

"Now, who is Stella?" wondered Nick. "She must be the clever woman who captured me this evening. I'll take a chance.

"She left me soon after leaving the Cumberland," he said, "saying that she would be here on time. You look superb in those diamonds!"

Bernice smiled and Anton grinned.

"You always admired the Maynard collection," she said.

Here was another puzzle for the detective. Had the thieves the nerve to present the stolen diamonds at the rehearsal? Could it be possible that no member of the club, outside those who belonged to the syndicate, knew of the true situation of affairs, of the murder of Townsend and the assault on Maynard?

"It strikes me," thought Nick, "that this dramatic club is composed principally of members of the Great Diamond Syndicate."

The detective shuddered as Bernice touched him, but he remained in conversation with her for a long time.

"There comes the chief," she said presently, pointing to a brisk appearing man just stepping on the stage. He was accompanied by a young fellow Nick had no difficulty in recognizing as the alleged reporter who had led him to the syndicate headquarters. There was no doubt that the man referred to as the chief was the same one who had planned his death the previous evening.

In looking over the members of the club, Nick saw that it was indeed composed mostly of members of the syndicate. The few outsiders who were there were the lambs of the organization. They had either diamonds, money or social position to thank for their admission. Nick now saw clearly what the club really was, an annex to the syndicate.

While the others were at their parts, Nick went back to his dressing room.

"What are you going to do when it comes time for you to go on?" asked Patsy. "You don't know a word of the part."

"If Chick acts promptly," said Nick, "the big scene will come off before I am called upon to speak my lines."

"It will be something of a surprise party," said Patsy. "Still, there are not so many members of the syndicate here that we know about. You have Mantelle, Stella, the two waiters, the guard at the old headquarters, and the man who tried to burglarize your house already under arrest. How many more are there here?"

"The chief," replied Nick, "the alleged reporter, Bernice, Anton, and the members of that glee club. Oh, we'll pick them all up if everything goes well."

"When does it come off?"

"Very shortly now."

At that moment there came a knock on the door leading to the hall. One of the members of the club opened it and six men, wearing the white uniforms of caterer's men, walked in, bearing great baskets covered with white cloths.

"A surprise!" cried half a dozen voices.

"A feed!" said Bernice, with a laugh.

"Who is responsible for this?" asked the chief.

The baskets were placed in the centre of the stage and the members of the company gathered about them.

Nick and Patsy stood back where the men who had brought the baskets could see every move they made.

Then, when the entire company was bending over the baskets, Nick gave a signal and seized the chief of the Great Diamond Syndicate!

There were screams, calls for help, and frantic efforts at escape, but in a moment every member of the club who belonged to the villainous Diamond Syndicate was securely handcuffed.

"How was that for a spread?" asked Chick, who had seized Anton.

"What does it mean?" demanded the chief, looking hard at Nick, still wearing the stage costume prepared for Mantelle.

Nick threw off his rig and stood revealed.

"I think," said the chief coolly, "that we have met before."

"Right you are," said Nick, "and under different circumstances. How do you like the change of positions?"

"I should like to have you as a working partner,"

said the chief. "You are courageous and resourceful, yet you sometimes make mistakes. You have made a scene here to-night and arrested practically all the members of this club. What charge can you make against us?"

The members of the club who had not been arrested now gathered around.

"What does this mean?" they asked.

They were mostly the sons and daughters of wealthy people, and they would in time have fallen victims to the syndicate.

"It means," replied Nick, "that you have been associating with murderers and robbers ever since you joined this club."

"That is strong talk," said the chief. "Be careful what you say."

Bernice Bouvé, who had been standing by Nick's side, now sprang away as if to make her escape by means of a window.

"Would you commit suicide?" asked the detective, restraining her. "It would be death to leap from that window."

"And it is death to remain here!" cried the girl.

The next moment she fell in a faint at the feet of the detective.

As she sank to the floor her hair caught on a button of Nick's coat and came off, revealing a short under wig of red hair.

"There!" said Patsy. "We have found the lady's maid who made up in so many different ways. See! She wore long black hair, then a wig of red, then her own black hair, cut short."

"Cut short at the prison," said Nick.

The head of the syndicate stepped forward and looked down upon the girl.

"I never supposed she lacked nerve;" he said.

"The electric chair has terrors for all," said Nick.

The chief remained silent. By this time the members of the club who were not under arrest were leaving the rooms, never to return. The prisoners were grouped on one corner of the stage, some of them in the costumes they had prepared for the play, which was now destined never to be presented by the club.

Nick picked up jewels as they fell from the unconscious girl.

"It seems," he said, "that Bernice cannot prove true even to her associates in crime. All the larger stones here are paste. How the girl substituted them for the real diamonds in one day's time is more than I can tell."

The chief of the syndicate and Anton stepped forward in angry wonder.

"The hand of this girl," said Nick, "appears in the larceny of the Harvard, Gould, Montreville, and Burns collections of diamonds. If the syndicate has them still, it might be well to examine them before they are restored to their rightful owners."

The chief muttered a savage oath.

"I have suspected the girl all along," he said. "That is why she has always been followed."

"For all that," said Nick, "she was your best assistant. She did her work cleverly and left no clue, as a rule. I can't understand how she came to murder Townsend."

"She never did!" shouted Anton.

"Wait!" said the chief of the syndicate. "We can't protect her in the crime which was not authorized by the syndicate. She murdered Townsend because he recognized her."

"And she and Mantelle, who is now in the Tombs, attempted the life of Maynard because he saw their faces and heard their talk? Is that it?"

The chief was silent.

"You can't prove what you say," said Anton, bending over the girl, who now showed signs of returning consciousness. "If that fool of a chief would only keep his mouth shut!"

"Look here," said Nick. "You say I have no proof. Let me tell you how the crimes were committed. When Anton and Bernice were released from prison the Great Diamond Syndicate went after them, and they readily agreed to become members of that unlawful organization. They executed the four robberies I have named, Bernice playing the part of lady's maid and Anton following her about as her lover. Then they came to the Maynard diamonds.

"This dramatic club was formed and a play which called for the display of a large number of diamonds was selected. The conspirators, through Mantelle, induced people of wealth to join, Maynard and Townsend among others. Maynard foolishly promised the use of his diamonds, and other members agreed to bring minor collections.

"At the dress rehearsal last night Maynard produced his gems. Then the game seemed ready to work. Mantelle made an appointment at the African fortune teller's. By the way, Stella, the fortune teller, is at present in the Tombs, charged with murder. While Mantelle and the gang were making things ready, Maynard and Townsend waited at a café. One member of the syndicate overheard what they said about getting rid of the diamonds. Bernice, having more nerve than the others, was appointed to get the stones. She was dressed in man's clothes, because that disguise was believed to be perfect. While the officers were looking for a man who had committed the crime, the guilty one would be back in her own habiliments.

"You all know how Townsend was followed and murdered. The chief undoubtedly told the truth. Townsend recognized Bernice, even under her disguise, and so was killed. Then the syndicate, terribly frightened, turned its energies toward defense. It was thought best to watch and destroy the detective who took the case in hand. But they did not expect that work would begin so soon. They were expecting a police detective. I was led to the headquarters of the syndicate, you all know how, and escaped.

"When the headquarters were burned for the purpose of destroying the records, Bernice was at the

Wisconsin with Mantelle, trying to find a ring she had lost in the room where the murder was committed. She did not find it, because I picked it up on my first visit to the place. I knew then whose ring it was. I had seen her wear it at the Maynard home when she was a maid there.

"On their way out of the hotel the elevator boy gave them the suit of clothes she had worn and which I had committed to the charge of the clerk."

The girl opened her eyes and arose slowly to her feet.

"You are telling a mess of lies!" she said.

"The suit you wore when you murdered Townsend," said Nick, "is now at my office. I found it in the closet off Stella's room on Houston Street. Anton bought it in Paris, and it was made over to fit you. The suit of Townsend's, which you wore away, was found in the same place."

"If they were in Stella's room, why don't you accuse her of the murder?" demanded Anton.

"Because the chief admits that Bernice committed the crime," was the reply.

"If she goes to the electric chair, he shall go with her," said the young man significantly. "He is as guilty as any one."

The chief of the syndicate sprang forward.

"You traitor!" he shouted. "You are telling lies!"

"Lies!" echoed Anton; "who planned the murder of the elevator boy, after he had been bribed and used? You did, and Stella threw the jar from the window of her room when he passed along there, directed to that place by you!"

"That is just the proof I have been looking for," said Nick. "My friend, the chief, would have made way with me last night. It gives me great pleasure to send him to the Tombs on charge of murder."

The chief of the diamond thieves, who had been so vain and so confident of his own ability only a short time before, now cringed with terror.

"They all had a hand in the affair of the boy," he shouted. "We passed upon the matter at a full meeting of the local branch of the syndicate. If I go to the electric chair, they go with me."

"I would go willingly," said Bernice, "if I could take this devil of a detective with me. You thought yourselves able to outwit him! See what has come to you!"

"At any rate," said Chick, "the Great Diamond Syndicate tried its best, and at one time I thought we were up against a stiff game. You see," he added, "all the clues in this case have been supplied by members of the syndicate!"

"Bad management!" shouted Anton. "I knew it all along. I told you what Nick Carter could do, and yet you allowed him to live when you had him bound."

"I don't believe that is Nick Carter," said another. "I waited under Stella's window to-night and received from her a signal showing that he had been killed."

"You're a fool!" shouted Anton. "That signal was given by Nick Carter himself to get rid of you. Your Stella is in the Tombs! Why he wasn't killed in that room is more than I know!"

"Because," replied Nick, with a smile, "they waited for the arrival of a man who had the nerve to do the killing, and that man was in the Tombs."

"This ends the Great Diamond Syndicate," said Chick.

"You are mistaken," cried the chief. "The syndicate will live on, and will train men to hate Nick Carter, to murder him."

The detective smiled and took a package of papers from his pocket.

"You are wrong again," he said. "Here are the records of the syndicate. Not two hours ago I filed a duplicate with the chief of police. By this time, every person in New York in any way connected with the syndicate is either under arrest or under surveillance. Your game is played out, gentlemen."

The prisoners were now handcuffed together and marched off to police headquarters.

"That closes the battle," cried Chick.

"It was an interesting game," replied Nick, "although there was little mystery concerning the murder. I could have named the murderer of Townsend within an hour after viewing his body, but the girl had to be found before a word was said. Then came the developments concerning the Great Diamond Syndicate, and that organization had to be cleaned up."

"Why were you so sure of Mantelle after the interview at the café?" asked Chick. "I know he rather overdid the thing there, but still I could see no proof."

"When I lay on the couch in the rooms of the syndicate," replied Nick, "I saw some peculiar jewelry lying on the chief's desk. Well, Mantelle wore that identical jewelry at the café. I could not believe it at first, for I did not remember seeing the chief take the stuff away in the hurry of his departure."

"But it was the same?"

"It certainly was. I saw that when I took the pin and the ring from Mantelle to-night. Well, you see how that connected him with the syndicate? And there never was any doubt that the syndicate was at the bottom of the murder."

The girl Bernice was taken to prison with the others, but managed to commit suicide in her cell. The chief of the diamond thieves, Anton, and Stella went to the electric chair, while other members of the famous league received long prison sentences.

The large diamonds which had been removed from the Maynard collection by Bernice were never found. After rounding up the syndicate Nick refused to engage in a hunt for the diamonds.

The case was fairly won, but the famous detective declares to this day that the cleverest criminals he ever encountered belonged to the Great Diamond Syndicate.

THE END.

The next number (648) will contain "The House of the Yellow Door; or, Nick Carter in the Old French Quarter."

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THE MODEL SAFE.

"I can't even begin to do it. I can't even begin," murmured Frank Denning in a tone of whimsical despair; and yet the conviction was growing in his mind that this was the chance of a lifetime, and that he must not merely make a beginning with the task he had been given to do, but actually bring it to a successful accomplishment, if he ever wished to emerge from the rut of obscure poverty in which circumstances had placed him.

And what was this difficult and troublesome task of his?

Before answering the question, and for the fuller comprehension of it, it is necessary to give the reader a brief account of Frank's present situation and prospects.

He had studied engineering, and was a qualified engineer, but he was in that fortunate condition—or should we say unfortunate?—of having been brought up with the idea that he need never earn his own living. Wasn't there his patrimony of a clear thousand a year to depend upon? Why should he bother his head about the future, when he had a certain income of this amount waiting for him when he came of age? The fortune had been left him by his father, and during his minority was administered by trustees.

When Frank came of age, exactly three months ago, he received a severe shock. He had no fortune, no income. His worldly goods consisted of such clothes and personal belongings as he possessed, of the few dollars he happened to have in his pocket, and of nothing else whatever. He was to all intents and purposes a pauper.

His story is common enough; he had been the victim of a rascally firm of lawyers, who had embezzled his fortune, and who, when their defalcation could no longer be concealed, had made a bolt of it—absconded.

There was nothing to be done; the money had gone beyond recovery. He had no influential friends to back him. Henceforth, for the winning of his bread and butter he must rely upon his own efforts solely. The thing was a tragedy in its way, because he had been accustomed and deliberately encouraged to look forward to an existence devoid of all sordid cares and anxieties. For the first time he was face to face and at grips with the stern, hard, and inexorable facts of life.

What was he going to do? Would he go under, or was he going to make a fight of it?

There was grit in him; he faced the facts.

He sold everything he could possibly spare, moved into cheap lodgings, lived on a quarter a day, and strenuously exerted himself to find a job.

This finding of a job proved difficult.

His credentials were excellent, and the representatives of the numberless engineering firms, on whom he called to demand work, admitted it, but they didn't employ him. He had so obviously followed his profession in a lazy fashion hitherto that they couldn't believe he was a worker. Workers only are wanted in these days of cutthroat competition, and no firm can afford to employ a man without a record on the mere strength of his gentlemanly appearance. In fact, to look too "gentlemanly" operates distinctly as a disqualification rather than a recommendation.

Frank Denning was listened to with interest, replied to with sympathy, and then politely ushered out. They wouldn't trouble him to call again; if they had anything to offer him they would write. They never had; they never wrote.

When Frank broke his last five dollar note he was as far off from obtaining employment as on the day he set out to search for it.

Then, as a final effort, it occurred to him to advertise.

He put a desperately worded advertisement into several papers, at a cost which, by reducing his personal expenses, left him with exactly enough money to pay the rent of his one room at the end of the week.

"A qualified engineer, young, strong, and active, is willing to undertake any job anywhere at any time at any wage.—Apply, etc."

He was on his beam ends, and he sat down to await the upshot.

He had not long to wait.

On the very evening of the day on which his advertisement appeared a benevolent old gentleman came stamping up the staircase, and without knocking opened the door and stumbled into his attic.

"You are Frank Denning. Very well. There's this. Find out about it for me. I'll call again in three days. If you are successful you may consider your fortune made. There's five dollars for you. Good-by!"

He placed a bank bill and a fair-sized parcel on the rickety table and stamped out again; and it was only when his echoing footsteps as he descended had faded into silence that Frank recovered from his amazement. That was two days ago, and since then he had done literally nothing but pore over the contents of the parcel.

At five o'clock to-day the old gentleman might be expected to return. What would he have to report to him—success or failure?

When Frank removed the wrappings of the parcel he found it to contain a beautifully executed model of a fireproof and burglar-proof safe, measuring six inches each way, of most ingenious construction. Pasted on the top of it was a typewritten slip, which ran:

"There is a flaw in the mechanism somewhere: can you find it out?"

This was the task set him, to find out the flaw in the mechanism; and he had been engaged on it every waking moment of the last two days.

The peculiar feature of this safe—the thing that distinguished it from and constituted its superiority to all other safes—consisted in this, that if any key or instrument or appliance, other than the right key, was inserted in the lock—in other words, if the lock was tampered with in any way—two steel arms stole round from the back of it, and clutched the would-be thief by the legs. There was no escape; those steel arms enclosed him as in a vice, and there he remained until the lawful owners of the safe came to release him and hand him over to the police. It was an amazing contrivance

—positively uncanny in its almost more than human cleverness and cunning—if it worked.

Did it work?

Frank at once applied himself to discover this. He set the apparatus, closed and locked the door, and then opened the safe by means of a miniature skeleton key which he formed out of a piece of bent wire. Instantly the arms stole noiselessly round and caught him; and if it had been a full size safe he would have been trapped by the legs in a grip from which he would have been absolutely powerless to free himself, while the alarm bell which immediately started ringing would have informed the owner or watchman that a thief was on the premises.

The thing therefore worked.

He tested it over and over again, and always with the same result—the instant the door opened, and the valuables in the safe might be supposed to be at the thief's mercy, so the arms stole round and caught him, and the alarm bell began ringing.

When it was opened with the right key none of these manifestations occurred—the arms remained concealed and stationary in the back of the safe, the alarm bell refrained from ringing, and the thing was just an ordinary normal safe for the secure storage of its owner's valuables.

Now, then, was there any flaw in it?

Was there any method by which a wary burglar might circumvent the safe's cunning and well-nigh diabolical intelligence?

Could any set of circumstances be devised under which the mechanism would fail to act!

He could think of none, he could devise none, though he made innumerable experiments to that end. The safe vanquished all difficulties, and triumphantly vindicated its inventor's ingenuity by catching the thief every time. It was flawless and invincible.

And yet, if the typewritten slip spoke truth, there was a flaw somewhere.

Was there?

Frank couldn't find it. Two days' hard thinking and hard trying proved the contrary. Mechanism, workmanship, and the scientific principles upon which the contrivance was based were all alike perfect. He understood these things; he was able to bring an expert knowledge to this investigation; he was able to appreciate, as only a trained inquirer could, the supremely subtle skill and ingenuity of the inventor, and he *knew* there was nothing wrong with it. The safe *must* catch the would-be thief with remorseless certainty every time.

In thinking over this matter Frank soon arrived at a satisfactory answer.

The old gentleman, who was presumably the inventor, didn't want a flaw found, didn't believe a flaw could be found; but what he did want was an independent and unbiased opinion upon the value of the invention, and had resorted to Frank for that purpose. Who so likely to detect a flaw, if flaw there was, as a clever young engineer in dire poverty, spurred to exercise his wits and his expert knowledge to the utmost, by the promise that his fortune was made if he succeeded?

That was the simple and rational explanation of the matter; but it was very dispiriting to Frank, who had founded vague hopes and dreams of prosperity upon fulfilling an impossible task. The only compensation, the only gleam of consolation he could see anywhere was that the old gentleman would be pleased with him for having failed, and not annoyed; and being manifestly kind and benevolent might be expected to find him some sort of permanent employment—nothing very lucrative, perhaps, but sufficient to enable him to live in decent and respectable comfort—a decent, living wage.

Punctually to the minute the old gentleman turned up.

"Well," he said, beaming upon Frank, "have you found the flaw?"

"No, sir, there is no flaw," was the reply. "I can congratulate you upon having invented a contrivance which is a masterpiece of useful ingenuity, a contrivance which renders the depredation of honest merchants' and bankers' safes a sheer impossibility. You have conferred a boon upon the community of inestimable value, and one that entitles your name to be ranked with the greatest benefactors of the age. For you it must mean fame and fortune, for I foresee the time when no office, countinghouse, strong room, public institution, or private residence, will be without one of your safes. No individual person, company, or corporation, with precious papers and goods to safeguard, will be able to afford to dispense with them. Burglars will have to go out of business, for the simple reason that you have rendered the successful prosecution of their nefarious trade impracticable. I foresee the dawn of a new era of peace and security for property owners, and I beg you will accept my humble but hearty congratulations on your consummate achievement."

Frank paused, out of breath, his genuine enthusiasm for the invention and the inventor having run away with him.

"You infernal young ass!" replied the old gentleman in vicious tones; and Frank, who had expected to be complimented upon his sagacity, stared at him aghast.

"Why, sir! didn't you want——"

"You infernal young ass!" repeated the other savagely.

"Why, sir, you ought to be glad that I——"

"What did I pay you a fee for; what have you been doing with your time?"

"I've spent every minute of it in investigating the mechanism of your safe, and I tell you it is the most perfect thing of the kind ever invented," answered Frank hotly, for his amazement had abated and given place to a very natural anger and indignation at being so unjustly abused. "I didn't ask you for the job. I've earned your wretched fee over and over again. If you'd gone to any ordinary consulting engineer you would have had to pay twenty times the amount for an opinion, and he wouldn't have done more for you than I've done. If you can't be civil, get out of my garret, and take your safe with you!"

This spirited retort at once produced its effect.

"Yes, yes, I was wrong to abuse you, Mr. Denning, but you must try to forgive me—and—and do you really mean to say that this invention is absolutely perfect?"

"Absolutely," was the reply.

Frank's indignation, having once flamed up, was not easily extinguished.

"I am surprised at the language you have permitted yourself to use to me. You ought to be very pleased at what I tell you. I accept your apology, but I don't wish to have anything more to do with you, and I think you'd better go," he added curtly.

But the old gentleman didn't go. He seemed to be utterly upset by what Frank had told him; and his attitude was so forlorn and dejected as he stood eying the safe that a sudden revulsion of feeling came over Frank, and he couldn't help being sorry for him, though what the other had to be forlorn and dejected about he couldn't for the life of him imagine.

"I don't understand, sir; did you really want me to find a flaw?" he asked.

"Yes, yes, I am grievously disappointed," came the answer in a feeble, broken voice.

"But if there isn't a flaw, sir, how could I possibly——"

"Don't talk to me like that!"

The old man seemed suddenly seized with a fresh paroxysm of frenzy, but he quickly controlled it, and proceeded in a tone of mild regret:

"I am sorry on your account—that's all! I thought you were clever. I had hopes of being able to put some good business in your way, of giving you a helping hand, but I can't now. You've disappointed me. I merely gave you

this job to test your ability, and you have failed. There is nothing more to be said. I can't help you. Give up engineering, and try to get a job at addressing envelopes. You are not fit for anything else. Good-by! Good-by!" And without another word the old gentleman picked up his model safe and hurried from the garret, leaving Frank a prey to the most bitter and poignant emotion.

So there was a flaw after all!

He had been given the chance of his life, and had failed to grasp it!

Then by one of those curious flashes of inspiration which come to the human brain when least expected, the solution of the problem was revealed to him, and he saw where the flaw was. The simplicity of the solution almost appalled him. It was a thing that ought to have been apparent to the meanest dullard, and it had escaped him—till now. He clattered down the staircase, taking the steps three and four at a time at the imminent peril of breaking his neck, and clearing the last flight at a single bound overtook the old gentleman just as he was stepping into a cab.

"I have found the flaw," he shouted, "I have found the flaw."

"No!" gasped the other.

"Yes!" reiterated Frank with triumphant vehemence. And then in an imploring tone: "Oh, please give me another chance, sir! If you'll only come upstairs I'll prove it to you in two minutes."

With generous alacrity the old gentleman returned to the garret, and there and then Frank demonstrated the flaw in the contrivance.

"No wonder you called me an infernal young ass, sir; I deserved it. Look here! The moment I tamper with the lock, the moment I open it with this skeleton key, the steel arms creep round from the back and grip me. There I am fast. Now, is there any way of escape, sir? Watch! My legs are bound, but my hands are free. All I've got to do is to close the door of the safe and lock it. See! the steel arms release their grip of my legs and fly back into the recess made for them. When you devised this safe you overlooked the fact that a thief had only to close and lock the door, after extracting the contents, in order to release himself from the grip of the steel arms. That's where the flaw in your invention lies, sir," he concluded triumphantly.

"You're right, Mr. Denning, you're right."

The other seized him by the hand and shook it as if he would never leave off.

"But you knew it all the time, sir, of course?"

"Oh, of course," replied the old gentleman.

"And you're satisfied that I am fit for something better than envelope addressing?"

"You shall hear from me to-morrow; your fortune's made, Mr. Denning," were his impressive parting words.

Considering how old he was he descended the staircase with extraordinary agility; and he left Frank happily dreaming of future fame and fortune.

Frank was literally penniless.

With the old gentleman's five dollars he had purchased a few indispensable necessaries of clothing, and had used the balance for a modest entertainment to celebrate his great good fortune. He had had no breakfast that morning, and no dinner the day before. But for the charity of his landlady he would have been turned out of his humble lodging. A week had elapsed since the inventor's visit, and he had not had a line or word from him.

Frank couldn't make it out. He couldn't believe he had been duped, for duping him would have been so senselessly cruel. The only reasonable explanation of the old gentleman's silence that occurred to him was that he had been taken suddenly ill or had met with an accident.

No doubt he would communicate with him when he recovered, but in the meantime Frank was starving. How foolish not to have asked for his address! How could he obtain it?

After long cogitation he remembered that the safe must have been patented, and that to find the name and address of the inventor he had merely to search a register of patents.

So he made inquiries at the office of a patent lawyer, searched his records and found the name and address, since the thief-catching safe was one of the most recent patents for which protection had been granted.

The patent was registered in the name of Messrs. Limner & Co., and the address given was on Broadway. He tramped thither at once, and found that Messrs. Limner & Co. were what is called "safe specialists," and occupied a spacious suite of offices on the first floor. Their business was evidently a very large and flourishing one, and he sent in his name by a clerk to the head of the firm with a feeling that surely now his troubles were at an end.

"Mr. Limner knows my name and will understand the business on which I wish to see him," he had said confidently to the clerk.

But the clerk presently returned with the message that Mr. Limner did not know him, and was too busy to be disturbed by casual callers; if Mr. Denning had any genuine business proposal to make he had better write, and it would be attended to in due course.

"But he does know me; he must have forgotten," replied Frank in dire distress. "Tell him it's about the thief-catching safe."

The clerk looked startled.

"What do you know about the thief-catching safe?"

"Everything. It was I who discovered the flaw in it," replied Frank wildly.

The look of startled surprise on the clerk's face deepened. He went and whispered something to the head clerk. The head clerk replied in an audible whisper: "All right, keep an eye on him; I'll go and tell the boss." And the upshot was that five minutes later he was ushered into Mr. Limner's private room.

"I am Mr. Limner. What do you want?" was the curt greeting.

But Frank wasn't looking at him. He was looking at the other man—a man in the uniform of a police captain.

"I—I beg your pardon, but you are not the gentleman who called on me," he stammered.

"No, I certainly never called upon you."

"I came to see the inventor of the new safe."

"I am the inventor of the new safe."

"But he was an old man."

"Now then, if you have anything to say, out with it; no use beating about the bush," struck in the officer brusquely; "you can make your statement here or at the station, whichever you like, but in any event I shall detain you on suspicion."

"On suspicion of what?" gasped Frank in amaze.

"Oh, feigning ignorance won't help you, young fellow. Out with it if you're going to turn State's evidence. The reward will be paid to you if you are not the actual thief. Now, then, no nonsense! I know your sort. Better tell a plain straight yarn; it'll be to your own interest in the end. No, let me manage him, Mr. Limner. Sir, I know these rogues better than you do; they don't understand gentle treatment. Now, then!"—and with a sudden movement the officer, a big, powerful man, seized Frank by the arm as if he intended to shake the life out of him, or else a confession.

"I think perhaps you'd better let me manage this, captain," interposed Mr. Limner, proving himself a better judge of men than the police officer.

"Won't you sit down, Mr. Denning?"

Frank dropped into the nearest chair.

"Oh, well, sir, if you insist, but as like as not you'll only get a string of lies"—and, with a shrug, the officer placed himself ostentatiously between Frank and the door to intercept any attempt at escape.

TO BE CONCLUDED.

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